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The Implementation of Social Abjection: Constructing and Contesting Disposability in the Neoliberal World of Never Let Me Go

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ABSTRACT

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) constructs a restrained yet profoundly unsettling dystopian world in which human clones are produced and brought up systematically for the sole purpose of being organ donors. Beneath the novel's apparently low-profile narrative is a disapproval of the social processes through which specific groups are abjected and excluded from moral regard. The study deploys Imogen Tyler's theory of social abjection, where the definition of abjection is revised as being enacted by institutional, discursive, and spatial processes. The article analyzes in the first section how the clones are constructed as abject subjects. It is proposed that following abjectifying tactics such as linguistic, media, and spatial stigmatization materialize the abject position of the clones, enabling their exploitation to be both possible and unproblematic in an ethical sense. The second section investigates the narrative voice of Kathy H., whose reflective and emotionally textured storytelling subtly disrupts the systems that define her as less than human. Although overt resistance is absent, Kathy's narration becomes a quiet form of subversion that reclaims subjectivity. By situating *Never Let Me Go* in social abjection discourse, this work illustrates how literature can reveal and push back against the ideological assumptions of marginalization.

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1- Introduction and Literature Review

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*¹ (2005) narrates the story of Kathy H., a human clone, alongside her peers, who are biologically constructed for the single purpose of donating vital organs to non-cloned human beings. Narrated in the form of Kathy's proleptic and analeptic flashbacks, the novel presents piecemeal knowledge about both the institutionalized childhood and the predetermined fate of these subjects. The book positions a dystopian world at the forefront wherein clones are being dehumanized step by step and their very lives rendered expendable for the sake of a hegemonic social order. Through this process of objectification and erasure, the clones are made biologically functional but socially and ethically invisible. A growing number of recent scholarship has engaged with the novel's depiction of embodied disposability and the dehumanization of the cloned object, bringing attention to the broader biopolitical interests involved in Ishiguro's depiction of life as utility. As Gabriele Griffin elucidates, in *Never Let Me Go*, corporeal fetishism materializes clones, meaning that "it renders them bodies or merely material entities, and simultaneously dehumanizes them" (2009, 655). Comparably, Richard F. Storrow points to the utilitarian purpose of creating clones and states, "Kazuo Ishiguro imagines a world in which the products of cloning technology are not considered human and thus, like other chattels, are appropriate targets for instrumentalist regulation" (2009, 265). Additionally, some scholars have noticed how the clones' lifespan is also short due to their instrumental nature. They are similar to "disposable commodities that are designed for a stipulated time frame after the expiry of which objects are classified as trash" (Karmakar and Pauri 2020, 9). As these studies have argued, *Never Let Me Go* is fundamentally a narrative concerned with dehumanization and the consequent rendering of certain subjects as expendable.

Whereas recent scholarship offers rich interpretations of *Never Let Me Go* along the lines of dehumanization and disposability of the body, it often falls short of questioning the circumstances making such dehumanization normative, namely, the social and discursive processes through which it is naturalized and sustained. This article addresses this critical lacuna by drawing on Imogen Tyler's framework to examine the ideological and discursive mechanisms that render the marginalization of cloned subjects both feasible and socially unproblematic. The article further argues that the clones in *Never Let Me Go* are not merely marginalized or objectified but are, rather, abjectified.

The present article adopts Tyler's theory of social abjection to delineate the abject status of the clones and to explore the socio-symbolic mechanisms through which the clones are systematically stripped of subjectivity and reduced to abject beings. Tyler's framework

Hereafter cited in the text as (*NLMG*)¹

elucidates how practices such as linguistic manipulation, media stigmatization, and spatial exclusion function as technologies of abjection that both produce and maintain a stratified social order. Drawing on this framework, the first part of the article demonstrates that the clones' condition is not simply one of oppression, but one that conforms to the structure of abjection. It then examines how various abjectifying techniques position the clones not just as excluded but as fundamentally unassimilable to the normative human. The second part of the analysis turns to the question of agency, investigating whether Ishiguro's narrative offers any potential for resistance, however subdued, to the abject status imposed upon the clones. In order to undertake this theoretical engagement, the following section provides an exposition of Tyler's conceptualization of social abjection and its applicability to the ideological and narrative structure of *Never Let Me Go*.

2- Theoretical Framework: Imogen Tyler's Social Abjection

In earlier historical periods, the subordination and marginalization of vulnerable groups of people were usually accomplished through overt and visible means of violence and exclusion. While it may be appealing to think of such practices as anachronisms of a more uncivilized past before the universalization of human rights, contemporary neoliberal societies have refined these tactics into more insidious and subtle versions, making them less visible and therefore more difficult to recognize and comprehend. In her seminal work *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, Imogen Tyler explores how social abjection is produced and governed through contemporary modes of rule. Tyler argues that contemporary apparatuses of power are depicting certain segments of the population, minoritized groups in particular, as being inherently "revolting," thereby legitimizing their surveillance, exclusion, and regulation (Tyler 2013, 3). This is accomplished, she contends, through what she refers to as "abjectifying technologies," which operate via institutional discourse, policy, and media to strip subjects of their social legitimacy. Central to this process is the logic of neoliberalism, a political rationality that treats market value as the primary measure of human worth. In neoliberal societies, where privatization and competition dominate, individuals are expected to continually prove their economic usefulness and personal marketability. Those who cannot be commodified, who fail to generate profit, productivity, or consumer appeal, are framed as noncontributors to the capitalist system and are thus rendered abject. It is precisely this market-driven calculus of value that allows abjection to thrive as a governing technology.

Tyler's theory of social abjection is a reformulation of Julia Kristeva's earlier psychoanalytic account of abjection. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva defines abjection as a necessary psychological process involved in the formation of the self. Subjectivity, for Kristeva, emerges through the symbolic expulsion of what is unclean,

disturbing, or incongruent with an integral sense of being (Kristeva 1982, 2-6). As Noëlle McAfee explains, Kristeva contends that the infant gradually establishes boundaries between self and other through the process of abjection, whereby the infant ejects objects that were previously experienced as part of the self (2007, 46). The process of abjection, for Kristeva, is marked by intense emotional reactions of nausea, disgust, or horror. Yet, the source of abjection is not the impurity of the body, but rather what provokes disruption of identity, undoes boundaries, and disturbs order, or what she calls the ambiguous or the "composite" (Kristeva 1982, 4). According to Kristeva, this psychic process does not necessarily fade with adulthood but persists into adulthood, continuing to exert its influence on social fears and cultural boundaries (McAfee 2007, 49). It is precisely this continual work of drawing and policing boundaries that makes the formation of subjectivity intelligible as a process of abjection rather than a simple maturation of identity. Abjection is not merely an accompanying feeling of disgust but the very mechanism through which the self consolidates by rejecting what threatens its coherence. Understanding subject formation as abjection foregrounds the constitutive role of exclusion and repulsion in the making of the subject, a logic that Tyler later extends from the psychic to the social and political sphere.

While it has been influential in its findings, Tyler criticizes Kristeva's model for minimizing abjection to an ahistorical and pre-symbolic event. Because Kristeva assigns abjection prior to learning language and social formation, Tyler argues that her model does not have the tools to explore the ways in which people are still formed as abject in political and social institutions. Tyler warns that this theoretical limitation functions as a kind of "memory hole" (Tyler 2013, 32), washing out the very real and ongoing experiences of the socially constructed abject bodies over the course of their lifetimes. In response, Tyler offers a sociological reinterpretation of the idea, advancing abjection as an externally imposed, socially mediated condition. For her, to be abject is to be perpetually situated as the object of dehumanizing, degrading, and disgusting dehumanization, a process that occurs in specific material and institutional realities (Tyler 2013, 4).

Tyler further argues that the mechanisms of producing abjection operate through different channels, including the use of derogatory language, media representations that sensationalize or demonize, and the material organization of space that excludes or confines the marginalized. All these symbolic and material mechanisms for excluding not only produce certain individuals as undeserving to be full persons but also serve to legitimate policies aimed at maintaining their exclusion. In neoliberal regimes, such rationality is internalized by the population at large, which thereby may justify or acquiesce in discriminatory treatment on the presumption that the

taken steps are economic or socially stabilizing. Governments can thus enact punitive legislation by portraying target groups as dangerous, deviant, or sub-human and appeasing the public conscience at the same time. The outcome is a system where inequality is not only institutionalized but rationalized, and where the abject are created as a byproduct of a social order that hides its violence behind a veil of normalcy. This type of abjection is most apparent in neoliberal culture, as the human is increasingly commodified, and those who are unable to provide their labor to the economy are cast off as "dehumanized waste, the disposable dregs" (Krauss 1996, 90).

3- The Abject Population in *Never Let Me Go*:

Intriguingly, one can observe a prime example of the mechanisms of an oppressive neoliberal system in *Never Let Me Go*, where clones' existence is monetized and rendered consumable. Scholars generally concur that the novel is critical of neoliberal ideology. Dale Pattison, for instance, argues that Ishiguro exposes the shortcomings of neoliberal humanism, a world in which clones "work within an unavoidable logic of the market that sanctions their subordination and saves lives for those who are privileged enough to acquire their organs" (2024, 340). Also, Jun Young Kim claims that the novel criticizes "neoliberalism deeply entrenched in the everyday life of modern Britain" (2021, 1). As discussed in the introduction, it is important to underscore the fact that not only are the bodies and lives of the clones objectified or commodified in *Never Let Me Go*, but also abjected. While at first this may strike us as a paradox, given the fact that abjection would seem to connote pollution, filth, and social revulsion, and the clones are biologically pure and of medical value, the paradox is in fact intrinsic to the ideological labor of dehumanization. Abjectifying the clones is not accidental but rather a route to an end of greater social rationality, which legitimates their exploitation. Through abjectifying them as unclean or debased, society can legitimate their exclusion and ultimate termination.

The text contains a number of moments that gesture toward the abject status of the clones. Notably, there is no explicit suggestion in the text that the clones are biologically incomplete or lacking souls. Rather, the reader always witnesses the clones experiencing emotionally dense and cognitively demanding experiences that assert their humanity. Furthermore, their interactions with members of the so-called normal population frequently go unremarked, which means that they are not behaviorally or physically distinguishable. This narrative strategy poses a deeply unsettling question: if the clones are physically and psychologically indistinguishable from "humans," on what grounds are they excluded from the category of humanity?

One possible answer that the novel initially appears to suggest lies in the abject origins of the clones. Midway through the narrative, the concept of "possibles" is introduced, that is,

human beings from whom the clones may have been modeled. The clones' search for their possibles becomes, in effect, a quest for origins, identity, and ontological legitimation. Kathy, for instance, speculates that due to her erotic longings, she may have been modeled on a possible who used to be a prostitute. In an angrily charged passage, Ruth formulates a hypothesis about the origin of clones, saying with harsh bitterness:

We all know it. 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. (*NLMG* 2005, 139)

Ruth's rant demonstrates an internalization of discourse on abjection. The clones are not devalued simply for being artificial or replicated, but because they are conceived to be produced from what is regarded as the lowest rungs of society, the so-called "trash" or underclass. In this regard, they are framed as copies of the abject, thereby inheriting the social stigma of their presumed origins. Georges Bataille's characterization of the abject as "the dregs of the people, populace and gutter" (1934, 9) is particularly accurate here, since the clones are placed in that symbolic realm of social waste specifically.

Yet despite this initial suggestion, one should note that the abject condition is not intrinsic to the clones but is brought into being through discursive projection by the outside. As Tyler affirms, "To experience oneself as black is precisely to be made black by a white other" (2013, 42). Similarly, Kathy, through her narration, implies that she starts to feel abject due to the ideological and emotional structures of the society. The clone subjectivities are thus shaped by a social system of abjection that situates them as inherently contaminating, unpalatable, and outside the boundaries of the human.

A second issue that needs to be considered is the reaction of non-clones to the clones upon encountering them. A key aspect of these encounters is disgust, a feeling which has a strong correlation with abjection. While Kristeva considers disgust to be a natural response toward what counts as abject, Tyler asserts that this reaction is not instinctual but politically motivated. Tyler contends that "disgust is thought to be an emotion associated with involuntary bodily response, moral disgust is often experienced, or retroactively interpreted, as a natural reaction: anyone would find x as disgusting as I do" (2013, 23). She rejects this claim by stating, "When we think about disgust as symptomatic of wider social relations of power, we can begin to figure out why disgust is attributed to certain bodies. Disgust is political" (Tyler 2013, 24). Disgust, Tyler contends, is more than a visceral or instinctual response but a socially constructed one that serves to police power hierarchies by stigmatizing certain bodies as abject. This theoretical stance draws attention to one of the novel's most pertinent moments, when Madame, one of the

wardens of Hailsham, visibly shudders in disgust at the students. The understanding of what Madame's response means is central to comprehending the process of abjection in *Never Let Me Go*. Kathy explains the moment as follows:

I can still see it now, shudder she seemed to be suppressing, the real dread that one of us would accidentally brush against her. And though we just kept on 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 (*NLMG* 2005, 24; emphasis added).

Madame's repellent reaction signifies a profound disgust, coupled with an implicit fear of contamination, as evidenced by her reluctance to make physical contact with the clones. Such a response epitomizes the dynamic that Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror*, identifies as the defining moment of encountering the abject: an instinctive expulsion of what threatens the integrity of the self. But contrary to what Kristeva proposes, it should be underscored that Madame's response is neither spontaneous nor natural but one rooted in ideological constructs of the sub-humanity of the clones. Her reaction works to solidify the location of the clones as abject beings. That is why Tyler suggests that one's abject state is constructed through the perceptions of others; that is, one is made abject by others (2013, 42). Kathy later continues to remark that after Madame's reaction, they were "a very different group from the one that had stood about excitedly waiting for Madame to get out of her car" (*NLMG* 2005, 29). What is important to realize here is that it is not Madame that has changed, but the clones themselves, who now view themselves from the abjectifying gaze of Madame.

Somewhere else, Kathy remembers how this meeting led them to see something grotesque about themselves, a realization that is not achieved until much later in the novel. Unlike in most other clone tales where a climactic revelation leads to the discovery of being a copy, in *Never Let Me Go*, "the shock of recognition that one is a copy or simulacra does not occur" (Sim 2010, 79). Rather, the clones become educated about how society perceives them (not who they are, but what they are perceived to represent by others). It is not until Kathy and Tommy encounter Madame and Miss Emily the second time that they become fully aware of the depth of their abjection. When Kathy says Madame is frightened, Miss Emily responds simply:

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*... (*NLMG* 2005, 224; emphasis added).

This recognition proves that the abject status of the clones is not a result of singular personal biases but a shared, systemic response embedded in the fundamental structure of society. The clones are not feared as individual aberrations but collectively abjected by various

apparatuses of society. These processes, replicated and reinforced through time, serve to normalize their abject status and reinforce their dehumanization within the social hierarchy. Most critically significant, however, is the degree to which Ishiguro's depiction of abjectifying processes within his fictional neoliberal environment parallels Tyler's theorization of abjectifying procedures in *Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. The remainder of this article will discuss these strategies of dehumanization more closely, starting with linguistic stigmatization and then proceeding to discuss how media representation and spatial stigmatization contribute to maintaining abjection.

3-1 Abjectifying Language as a Means of Oppression

The deployment of derogatory language as a tool of subjugation requires no elaborate theoretical scaffolding; history is replete with examples of how linguistic practices serve to marginalize specific social groups. As Katherine Marcoccio notes, "the structures of oppression" are written and persist "in so many ways in language usage" (1995, 155). Derogatory terms such as 'Negro,' 'Hippie,' or 'Chav' have been employed strategically to debase or delegitimize the identity of certain groups. Although these terms and phrases are typically dismissed as innocuous or amusing, they involve profound social and psychological repercussions. As Michael Billig observes, humor, in particular, becomes a medium for disseminating prejudice because it enables the recipients to indulge in "the pleasures of hatred" (2001, 267) with impunity. Tyler also points out the role of language in the abject process, declaring it as one of the key instruments in facilitating abjectifying technology. Tyler explains the way in which political ideologies about the underclass converge with popular culture; therefore, jokes have become a mundane method through which contempt, ridicule, and disgust are applied to subordinated others (2013, 164-165). The comedic presentation of abjectifying ideas conceals its deep-seated violence, allowing the speaker and the listener to disregard the harm it inflicts. In *Never Let Me Go*, the process is observed in how clones employ humor as a defense against their hopeless situation. As much as direct confrontation of fate is largely eschewed, the clones relentlessly employ humor to quip about their ultimate organ donations, thus concealing trauma through ironic detachment. The following is a quote from the book, showing how cruelty towards clones becomes normal through the use of jokes.

It became something we made jokes about [...]. Looking back now, I'd say the rule about not discussing the donations openly was still there, as strong as ever. But now it was okay, almost required, every now and then, to make some jokey allusion to these things that lay in front of us (*NLMG* 2005, 71).

The clones' ironic references to their fate reflect an internalization of their abject status, showing how humor works as a tool that masks dehumanization while helping maintain social

control. Furthermore, the clones employ euphemistic language to soften the brutality of organ donation. Specifically, they jokingly refer to the procedure as "unzipping," theorizing that "a kidney or something would slide out" without difficulty (*NLMG* 2005, 74). This metaphor reduces the violence of forced organ harvesting to a small and mechanical process, as if the body were an inanimate object without feeling or sensitivity. Humorously contextualized, this type of language trivializes the seriousness of their plight, as donation is something that is only normally spoken of "just to get a laugh" (*NLMG* 2005, 74). Kathy attributes this levity to the guardians' refusal to provide the clones with complete information about their destinies, especially the certainty of their deaths.

In a bid to normalize the act of organ harvesting, the guardians also engage in strategic linguistic manipulation. The application of terms such as 'switching off' and 'completion' to refer to 'death' strips the act of forced donation of its exploitative and violent connotations while endowing the clones with mechanistic, dehumanized qualities. Grouping death with the harmless act of switching off a lamp reconceptualizes death as peaceful and inevitable rather than traumatic or unjust. Language therefore, works here as a tool of abjectification, concealing the violence inherent in the donation process and promoting passive acceptance. The guardians routinely use manipulative language to prepare the clones for their grim fates, creating a condition of half-awareness that Miss Lucy encapsulates in the phrase: "they have been told and not told" (*NLMG* 2005, 75). Even the terminology by which the clones are spoken to, for example, 'students' instead of 'clones', helps to conceal their identity, both obscuring the reality of their existence from them and mediating the discomfort of the guardians. Similarly, titles such as 'carer' and 'guardian' imply a misplaced sense of dignity and responsibility, hiding the coercive and exploitative nature of the relations involved. As John Mullan points out, the terms convey "a kind of official admiration for what may well be resentfully undertaken" (2009, 108). Within this linguistic framework, the clones consent to their subordinated status without complaint, considering their abjection as natural instead of as a constructed injustice. Hailsham's victory is precisely this insidious indoctrination: it produces docile subjects by calibrating their disposability to language. Language is not, however, the sole mechanism through which the clones' abjectification is normalized; media stigmatization is also at the heart of public opinion and the validation of their marginal status. While discourse establishes the conceptual framework that defines the clones as expendable, it is through the media that these ideas are circulated, sensationalized, and made to appear natural to the public. The next section therefore examines the media's role in reinforcing the linguistic and ideological work traced above.

3-2 Abjection of Individuals through Media Stigmatization

Tyler emphasizes the powerful role played by the media in legitimizing abjection policies. She cites numerous instances where television portrayals of immigrants were accompanied by increases in hate speech, vandalism against property, and physical violence directed against asylum seekers (Tyler 2013, 165). Tyler argues that "figures at the highest level of government joined forces with corporate news media organizations to ratchet up public fears about an imminent asylum catastrophe" (2013, 92). The stigmatizing discourses circulated by the media, she argues, are at the center of the very real marginalization of minority groups. In *Never Let Me Go*, although the narrative remains largely within segregated and contained spaces, shutting us off from the broader social realities, there are few allusions to the role of the media.

In Kathy and Tommy's final interview with Miss Emily, she refers to "that horrible television show," which "began to turn the tide against the clones" (*NLMG* 2005, 220). Facts may be left out, but the implication is clear: media representations were the clincher that broke public sympathy for the clones and brought the reform movements to an end. Nonetheless, the influence of the media on the lives of the clones goes beyond an isolated incident of public uproar. The media, as Tyler suggests, not only marks the boundaries of what is abject but also produces normative expectations around social behavior. Kathy recalls that "Television at Hailsham had been pretty restricted, but at the Cottages, there was nothing to stop us watching all day" (*NLMG* 2005, 109). This new and unregulated access to television intensifies their awareness of social difference, prompting them to measure their own lives against the mediated images of "normal" society. As the clones move to the Cottages and are immersed in mass culture, they grow increasingly attuned to their separation from the wider world and attempt to bridge that gap by imitation. Kathy observes that the couples at the Cottages performed their relationships as though "so many of their mannerisms were copied from the television" (*NLMG* 2005, 108), adopting gestures, postures, and even patterns of argument from the dramas they consumed: "the way they gestured to each other, sat together on sofas, even the way they argued and stormed out of rooms" (*NLMG* 2005, 109). Their obsession with television mirrors their fascination with magazines, where Ruth meticulously studies office advertisements and glossy images of furniture. These practices reveal that the clones are not merely passive consumers of media but desperate participants in a cultural script that defines what it means to be human.

Amongst the Hailsham students, Ruth is particularly keen to conform to media-established notions of normality. Kathy notes that "it wasn't long before Ruth worked out how she'd been going on about Tommy was all wrong for the Cottages, and she set out to change the way they did things in front of people" (*NLMG* 2005, 100). Ruth even disposes of her most prized collection of memorabilia from Hailsham because she begins to see it as out of step with what

is “normal” (NLMG 2005, 108). Through such actions, the clones struggle to resist their abjection by embodying the social scripts written by the media. Though Ruth tries to construct a new identity that is not beholden to the stigma of inferiority, she herself remains unaware of the performative and constructed nature of her actions. The mannerisms she adopts from television representations feel natural to her precisely because they align with mediated norms. As Tyler explains, the mass media is central to the stigmatization of marginalized groups, not only by portraying them as menacing or less than human but also by establishing collective understandings of the normal and desirable. Ruth’s assumed identity, however, cannot ultimately free her from her status as abject. She remains what is stigmatized and condemned by the very media she imitates, able only to briefly adopt an appearance of normality without escaping the underlying abjectifying structures. This stigmatization extends beyond bodies and identities to the spaces they inhabit, marking certain locations as abject zones that reinforce social exclusion. The following section explores these spatial dimensions of abjection and their role in sustaining the broader marginalization of the clones.

3-3 Spatial Dimension of Abjection (Abject Zones)

One of the conditions that enables the abjectifying process is the existence of abject spaces, or what Tyler refers to as spaces of stigmatization. Spaces of stigmatization are not abject by nature, but they are constructed to be branded as such by their social construction and symbolic association with stigmatized populations. Tyler argues that territorial stigmatization is an integral aspect of abject body regulation by physically distancing them spatially and marking their devaluation onto the geography they inhabit. These spatial practices are not only symptomatic of exclusion but rather are active in the production of and maintenance of exclusion, making specific environments dumping grounds for persons rendered undesirable through hegemonic social configurations. Tyler states,

If the abject is a spatializing politics of disgust, which functions to create forms of distance between the body politic proper and those excluded from the body of the state (and forced to live in internal border zones such as the banlieues), then the politics of the abject is a counter-spatial politics which attempts *to reclaim the spaces and zones of abjection as radical sites of revolt and transformation*. (2013, 41; emphasis added)

Tyler points out how important a role physical spaces play in facilitating the politics of disgust. Spatial exclusion becomes a tool to stigmatize specific populations as abject. Living beyond the periphery of the city proper tends to smooth the way for the social devaluation of people who live in such outlying areas. As Stefan Kipfer sees, "Certain threshold zones become abject zones and are policed with vigor: The Arab Cashbah, the Jewish ghetto, the Irish Slum [...]" (2011, 1157). These sites, which are inhabited by the marginalized, are symbolically and

physically separated from the so-called clean areas of the dominant class. This segregation in space, constructed through what Tyler terms "hyphenated governmentality" (2013, 38), reproduces the abjection and the felt polluting presence of the abject population. The stigmatized view of these areas by society at large allows the state to implement policies of neglect, control, or brutality with minimal opposition. Once isolated from the ruling people and forced to these wretched spaces, these subjects are not even considered part of the social body but are assumed to lie outside of its political and moral limits.

In *Never Let Me Go*, the reader is presented with only a finite perspective of life in the wider society because the characters simply transfer from Hailsham to the Cottages and then to the hospitals. In a way, "we look at the world through the eyes of a character of limited consciousness" (Robbins 2007, 293). This narrow scope is a feature common to most of Ishiguro's novels. Barry Lewis has made the observation that "one of the Austen-like features of these books is the small canvas they portray" (2006, 11). The novel only mentions cities occasionally and vaguely, and few hard facts are disclosed about other clone centers by readers. Even after Hailsham, the clones have no inclination to look beyond the immediate vicinity. Kathy starts her account with vague reminiscences about Hailsham, constantly emphasizing its strengths and setting it apart from the rest of the institutions. She is grateful to have spent her childhood there. Gradually, it turns out that other clones look up to and even envy the pupils of Hailsham. One of Kathy's donors, looking back on the past, says, "I bet that was a beautiful place" (*NLMG* 2005, 9). Similarly, Chrissie, one of the friends Kathy meets at the Cottages, says, "I know how lucky I am, getting to be at the Cottages. But you Hailsham lot, you're really lucky" (*NLMG* 2005, 126). These remarks raise an influential question: What is so remarkable about these seemingly bleak and regulated situations? Why would the clones be so fortunate to have lived in these kinds of regions?

To begin with, one needs to examine how the clones perceive the world around them. They have been isolated from the outside world since they were young, having remained within the confines of their institution for roughly seventeen years, with basically no contact beyond its walls. Any desire that they might have had to venture out was nipped in the bud at a young age through the induction of fear. Hailsham was surrounded by woods, which, as Kathy states, were associated with scary stories: "There were all kinds of horrible stories about the woods" (*NLMG* 2005, 41). The children were terrified even by merely looking at the forest, let alone venturing into it. These stories, which often involved the deaths of other clones, effectively kept the children inside Hailsham by creating a deep psychological boundary. As their fear of the woods diminished with age, they developed a more complex fear of the outside world. No longer scared of ghost stories, they feared instead the repercussions of their presence in society.

Physically close to but mentally far from those they viewed as "normal people," they were acutely aware of their abject condition and the possibility of detection. Hailsham students "are raised like animals and are denied the freedom, choice, and opportunities of being ordinary human beings" (Bagheri Heydari, Najar, and Bagheri Heydari 2024, 39). Their prolonged segregation and continued occupancy of a stigmatized setting became fundamental to their identity, shaping how they viewed their place in the world.

Hence, the spaces given to them, such as Hailsham, are not designed to protect the abject population but to produce it. But because Hailsham is the only place the clones have ever known, it becomes their psychological sanctuary. It serves as the sole space that keeps them from directly confronting their abject condition. This illusion of security is lost once they are moved to the cottages. The sense of comfort that was once associated with the abject space of Hailsham is never recovered. As Kathy confesses toward the end of the novel, she is constantly "on the lookout for Hailsham" (*NLMG* 2005, 239), a phrase indicative of nostalgic yearning for the one environment that allowed her to experience a sense of belonging, however fleeting. In this sense, Hailsham occupies an interestingly paradoxical position: it creates the clones' abject status while simultaneously providing psychological protection from fully confronting their abject condition, a confrontation they would likely face in the 'normal' outside world. Consequently, the eventual demolition of Hailsham has a devastating emotional effect on the clones. Ruth, for instance, describes a dream about the place:

"I knew the whole place had been shut down, but there I was, in Room 14, and I was looking out of the window and everything outside was flooded. Just like a giant lake. And I could see rubbish floating by under my window, empty drinks cartons, everything" (*NLMG* 2005, 186).

The floating garbage in Ruth's dream symbolizes the clones themselves, taken away and discarded by an institution that created them solely so they would be annihilated. Hailsham, in this case, functions not as a school but as a garbage disposal plant, a sector that transforms human life into social garbage. Such symbolic occurrences do suggest that Hailsham was not so much a boarding school. It was an institution that effectively produced the subjectivity of the clones. Whether Hailsham, the cottages, or state houses, spatial restriction of the marginalized, as Miss Emily refers to it, their relegation to "the shadows," is part and parcel of the continuous production of abject identities (*NLMG* 2005, 234). The question that remains is if and when the clones would ever be able to occupy space that does not define them as abject.

Ishiguro does not provide the clones with a fixed, tangible place outside the abject system, but he does suggest that they mentally construct an ideal third place for themselves. This place is "a quiet corner of England, quite nice. But it's also a bit of a lost corner" (*NLMG* 2005, 55). The place in question is Norfolk, which is an empty space on Miss Emily's classroom map. It

is a location Hailsham pupils have never seen and cannot see with their eyes, but which gradually comes to feel like a dreamscape. Norfolk for the clones is not a geographic location but a symbolic one, a transitional third space in which their unheard aspirations and unrealized desires are charted. This imaginative space is replete with potential for discovery, redemption, and other worlds, but can only exist as an absence in the cartography of the known world. Norfolk, therefore, becomes utopia made flesh, a place of visionary, un-objectionable freedom that can only be conceived. It is the hope for a perfect world that cannot be inhabited, at least at present. It is a nowhere for those who, as the clones, have been denied a place in the neoliberal world as it currently exists. A final question arises: Is it possible for the clones to create a real utopian, or at least un-objectionable, space for themselves that might serve as a site of rebellion or resistance?

In the novel, the clones' passive acceptance of their predetermined deaths illustrates what Georg Lukács calls reification, the process by which social and economic constructs come to appear natural and immutable (qtd. in Ryan 2011, 310). Through language, spatial segregation, and media, organ donation is presented as a law of nature rather than a human policy. Both the "normal" population and the clones internalize this ideology: guardians like Miss Emily defend Hailsham's achievements while ignoring the brutality of donation, and clones such as Ruth embrace their fate as "what we're supposed to be doing" (NLMG 2005, 188). Conditioned from an early age, they internalize the norms of the system, suppressing dissent and even disciplining peers who challenge its authority. Hence, while overt acts of rebellion may be largely absent, subtler, covert forms of resistance are nonetheless observable. The following section examines this phenomenon in greater detail.

3-4 Kathy's Revolt: Creating an Un-objectionable Space through Narration

Tyler, in *Revolting Subjects*, foregrounds the dual meaning of the word "revolt": first, as an expression of disgust or loathing, and second, as acts of resistance or rebellion against authority (2013, 3). She insists that these two senses are not merely parallel but mutually generative. The very process of being revolting, being cast out as disgusting, creates the conditions in which the abject may revolt, turning the stigma back against the system that produced it. In other words, the very mechanisms that degrade and exclude also generate the affective energy and the political urgency that can be redirected against the dominant order. Revolt, for Tyler, therefore includes not only spectacular political action but also quieter practices of refusal, memory, and counter-storytelling that disrupt the normative order. Such practices may appear insignificant, yet they chip away at the boundaries that sustain social hierarchies and open spaces where alternative forms of belonging can emerge. In *Never Let Me Go*, both dimensions are present. While the first meaning, that is, clones as subjects of social and bodily, disgust has been addressed earlier, the second, the potential for resistance, is more ambiguously developed.

Though the novel does not depict overt rebellion, it suggests subtle forms of undermining the abjectifying ideology.

It can be argued that such an unobject space for resistance and rebellion is constructed within Kathy's narration. She creates Norfolk within the blank space of the paper (her writing), since the physical world she inhabits is devoid of any unobjectifying quality. Numerous studies have explored the significance of Kathy's narration. For instance, according to Carmen-Veronica Borbely, Ishiguro's story is a literary intervention to put to center stage the bioethical concerns that have been intentionally obscured by an ethically desensitized and dehumanized world (2015, 9). Likewise, Karl Shaddox claims that while the clones are subjected to systematic dehumanization, the novel itself strives to restore their humanity by creating "an emotional connection between Kathy and the reader" (2013, 460). This affective strategy, Shaddox contends, makes it possible for readers to notice and feel for Kathy and, in turn, other clones whose subjectivities otherwise remain made invisible by the world they inhabit. Extending this line of argument, Titus Levy characterizes the novel as a form of "human rights storytelling", arguing that Ishiguro intends to affirm the inherent humanity of oppressed communities and to advocate for the "democratic rights of oppressed communities" (2011, 15).

However, what is often absent from these studies is an examination of the impact Kathy's narration has on the identity of the clones and on prevailing definitions of what they are. While her narrative is neither overtly polemical nor explicitly denunciatory of the socio-political structures that oppress her, it quietly yet persuasively subverts these structures by humanizing the figure of the clone. Put more simply, Kathy's narration exerts a de-objectifying effect, achieved primarily through the style of her storytelling rather than solely through its content. Kathy's innocence through conditioning and narrow worldview prevents her from clearly declaring the structural basis of her exclusion. But in the process of telling her story, narrating about her feelings, her relationships, and her interior world, the process itself is one of self-affirmation that effectively subverts the abjection ideology implicitly. As Tyler indicates, abjection is less a cultural feeling than a political move that demarcates the boundary of citizenship and humanity:

The forms of abjection, which are integral to the productive work of sovereign power upon populations, delineate not only who is a citizen (or not) *but also constitute who counts as 'human' in a given place or time* (2013, 221; emphasis added).

Kathy's story, that is, is a textual gesture towards un-objectifying herself. This is hardly a contentious statement because Ishiguro's novels "readily engage historical or political realities, but history and politics are explored primarily in order to plumb the depth and shallows of the

characters' emotional and psychological landscapes" (Shaffer 2008, 8). Therefore, the historical and sociological realities reveal information about the characters' attributes. In the case of *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy's narration avows her humanity before a biopolitical order that habitually denies her as a subject. The tone and the mode of her narration are crucial here. Up to the first half of the novel, readers are unaware that Kathy is a clone. Her quiet and reflective demeanor, coupled with the seemingly bourgeois details of life in boarding school, is very much a characteristically Bildungsroman narrative mode. Her prose is filled with colloquial language and slang, and her preoccupations are those of any "normal" human being.

This narrative strategy disarms the reader. By the time the reader learns about Kathy's origins and death, they have already become emotionally invested in her. The shock of this revelation performs two functions: it reveals the reader's own complicity in naturalizing abjection, and it reveals the arbitrary nature of the human/non-human dichotomy. In this sense, Kathy's narration performs what Ruth attempts through mimicry: she situates herself within the norms of human behavior in order to be seen as human. But whereas Ruth's is a superficial acting and in the end a failure, Kathy's literary fashioning of self succeeds. Using language, she activates a sympathetic response and calls into question the very conditions of what it is to be human. Kathy's narration, written after Tommy's death and in the light of her own mortality, is most poignant in the final scene of the novel:

Up in the branches of the trees, too, I could see, flapping about, torn plastic sheeting and bits of old carrier bags. That was the only time, as I stood there, looking at that strange rubbish, feeling the wind coming across those empty fields, that I started to imagine just a little fantasy thing, because this was Norfolk after all, and it was only a couple of weeks since I'd lost him" (*NLMG* 2005, 240).

This picture of flying plastic and garbage caught in the trees is rich in symbolic content. It is evocative of the story Miss Lucy tells about World War II concentration camps, where barbed wire fences electrocuted any would-be escapers. The plastic garbage reflects the state of the clones: trapped, suspended, and discarded by a system that makes their existence trivial. These symbolic boundaries, ideological and literal, bind Kathy and her friends to an assigned destiny. Yet by fantasizing that she is one of the women in this ghostly vision, Kathy does more than bemoan. She exposes the heartlessness of a world that promises no exit and fantasizes about freedom.

This final meditation also recalls the ideological boundary of Hailsham itself, a school established to cover up its own complicity in the subordination of the clones. At the end here, Kathy will not escape her fate, but she does break the text that legitimates it. As Sean Matthews and Sebastian Groes describe, "She has no possibility or fantasy of a biological relationship

with another person. Yet she is another human being" (2009, 113). Kathy cannot avoid her ultimate destiny, yet she establishes an un-bject identity through the act of storytelling. Her story is a space where she retains her recollections and reasserts her subjectivity.

Thus, the middle-of-novel revelation of Kathy's clone status operates on several levels. It accords with the reader's own expectations of humanness and emphasizes the social construction of abjection. Kathy is both mundane and strange, human and nonhuman, familiar and foreign. Her state, though depicted as singular, is actually fungible. The economy of abjection, as Tyler reminds us, can be applied to anyone. If there can be said to be any successful act of rebellion, it is one which restores dignity and visibility to the abject. By doing so, she points the reader's attention not at the monstrosity of the clones but at the monstrosity of the society that ostracizes them. She does not overturn the system in her writing, but she offers a counter-narrative that challenges its foundation.

4- Conclusion:

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* offers an unsettling yet incisive portrait of how neoliberal systems manufacture, maintain, and normalize the abjection of entire populations. Reading the novel in conjunction with Imogen Tyler's sociological analysis of social abjection, it becomes clear that the clones' position is not merely one of oppression or objectification but of systemic abjection, which is produced through a complex nexus of language, media, spatial segregation, and internalized stigma. This state of disposability is legitimized as it is rendered common, even natural, in the ideological framework of the society given.

In the meantime, Ishiguro refuses his characters an overtly revolutionary path. Instead, resistance becomes an issue of subtle narrative reclamation. Kathy H.'s story is a quiet but potent counter-discourse, one that re-humanizes the clone body and disturbs the structures of meaning undergirding her abject state. In memory, intimacy, and affect, her narrative constitutes a symbolic space, Norfolk-like, inassimilable to the logic of the system. This space does not, perhaps, overthrow the apparatus of abjection, but it bears witness to the humanity of the ones that it seeks to erase.

Lastly, *Never Let Me Go* warns that the mechanisms of abjection it depicts are not confined to speculative dystopia but are continuous with real-world processes whereby neoliberal societies manage marginality. Ishiguro's novel illustrates that the abject is not an inherent identity but a produced status, one that could be extended to anyone, provided the right political and economic conditions. In pointing out this reality, the novel challenges readers to recognize their own involvement in such systems and to imagine counter-narratives that can work to restore dignity, visibility, and belonging to those excluded to the margins.

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