

Deterioration of Proletariats in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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ABSTRACT

Kazuo Ishiguro, a British novelist, screenwriter, musician, and short story writer, explores a dystopian world in his medieval fantasy novel, *Never Let Me Go*. The narrative revolves around the creation of human clones destined to donate their organs as young adults to the privileged class. This paper delves into Ishiguro's depiction of the working class from a Marxist critical perspective, examining power struggles between social classes, the organization of the economy, and the exploitation and mistreatment of the powerless. Ishiguro maintains a Marxist focus on the bourgeoisie's inventions and their impact on the proletariat. Additionally, he employs symbolism to illustrate that, despite their efforts to embrace Hailsham's ideals and integrate into mainstream society, clones remain proletariats. Ishiguro strongly critiques the expectation for lower classes to not only obey but also sacrifice their lives for the ruling elite, challenging societal norms through this novel.

Keywords: Proletariats, Powerless, Marxist, Society, clones, class struggle.

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* is an intricate exploration of memory, identity, and the implications of scientific advancements on society. Its emotional impact, complex narration, and striking vision of an alternate dystopian Britain make it a compelling intellectually engaging read. Ishiguro skillfully interlocks these themes together, creating a narrative that forces readers to confront unpleasant realities about the value placed on human life and the consequences of societal inequality. In Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, the identity crisis is explored through the perspective of the main characters, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy. They are trapped in a dystopian reality where their lives are predetermined, devoid of autonomy or freedom. Their existence as clones represents a modern-day proletariat, bred and exploited for the benefit of the elite. As they navigate their lives at Hailsham, a boarding school, they begin to question their role in society and struggle with their sense of self-worth. The novel delves into their emotional turmoil and the profound impact it has on their relationships and personal growth.

In the realm of social science, identity is defined as the origin and outward expression of an individual's distinctive traits or their association with a group of people. Identity can be seen as the visible indication of shared traits with someone else or as the clear marker of belonging to a specific social category or community. The word itself originates from the French term "identité," which, in turn, stems from the Latin word "identitas-tatis," derived from the Latin modifier "idem," meaning very similar to "Identity".

Erik Homburger Erikson coined the term "identity crisis," viewing it as a fundamental struggle individuals encounter in their developmental journey. According to Erikson, this conflict plays a crucial role in personal maturation.

An identity crisis is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself. It is a subjective sense and an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image. As a quality of unself-conscious living, this can be gloriously obvious in a young person who has found himself as he has found his communality. In him we see emerge a unique unification of what is irreversibly given—that is, body type and temperament, giftedness and vulnerability, infantile models and acquired ideals—with the open choices provided in available roles, occupational possibilities, values offered, mentors met, friendships made, and first sexual encounters. (Psychology Wiki).

An Individual's identity is multifaceted, with its various elements closely intertwined in shaping one's sense of self. It emerges through the interplay of both internal and external influences. Factors like gender, sexual orientation, religion, race, nationality, generation, political beliefs, geographic location, occupation, culture, and socioeconomic status are among the many variables that play a role. Individuals have a degree of choice in shaping their own identity, making identities self-driven, intricate, and subject to change over time. Furthermore, the connection between a person's personal identity and their social identity is ever-present.

Never Let Me Go centers around the protagonist, Kathy H., who struggles with the identity she is given by society. Kathy, and the people around her, have been genetically engineered to donate their organs, and as such, are seen as nothing more than "medical products." Kathy's identity crisis is multifaceted, as she struggles with the identity given to her by society, the identity she feels is truly her, and the impact her donors have on her life.

Class struggle is one of the central themes explored throughout the narrative. The story is set in a dystopian society where clones, known as "donors," are created to provide organs for the "normal" population. The primary class struggle in the

novel is between the clones themselves and the "normal" society. The clones are created solely for the purpose of organ donation, and they are constantly reminded of their inferior status. They are segregated from the rest of society and live in isolation in a boarding school called Hailsham. This segregation reflects the idea of social class division and inequality. At Hailsham, the clones are taught that they are special and that their lives have meaning beyond their purpose as organ donors. However, this is only a facade created by the school's guardians to provide a false sense of hope and purpose to the clones. In reality, they are treated as commodities, destined to have their organs harvested until they "complete" or die.

The clones also face a class struggle within their own community. Some clones, such as Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy, question their fate and long for a different future. They resist the oppressive system and try to find meaning and purpose in their lives beyond being organ donors. This struggle for self-determination and agency is a constant battle for the clones, as they navigate their limited time before their donations begin.

Moreover, the "normal" society also plays a role in perpetuating the class divide. They view the clones as subhuman, refusing to acknowledge their humanity or right to a full life. The "normal" individuals benefit from the clones' organ donations, exploiting their bodies to prolong their own lives. This exploitation and devaluation of the clones' lives reinforce the unequal power dynamics within the society.

Never Let Me Go bears a resemblance to a personal diary, albeit with a unique twist – it belongs to a compassionate thirty-one-year-old clone. Narrated in the first person, it takes readers on a nostalgic journey through her childhood at Hailsham, a fortified school set in an alternate 1990s England, alongside her dear friends Ruth and Tommy. This work of science fiction the novel invites the reader to envisage a future in which genetic cloning defines the twentieth century is defining technology.

On that note; it raises a few questions: What sets humans apart from clones? Who are these clones as individuals? Should human treat them as mere objects due to their artificial origins? Clones possess intelligence, emotions, and, above all, the right to life. In many ways, they share similarities with humans. However, the fundamental differences in how they come into existence create a multitude of contrasts. This paradox of being identical to humanity yet separate makes the clones' lives tragic as they grapple with questions of identity.

"Who am I?" is a question all individuals ponder in their quest for identity, but clones face an additional query: "What am I?" To truly understand their existence as clones, they must delve into a significant part of who they are. At the start of the story, the narrator, one of the trio-clone protagonists, introduces herself as "My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years" (1). In human society, the initial in a name connects an individual to their family, but for the clone, it triggers curiosity, hinting at the name of her "possible," the human model for whom Kathy was created with the hope of providing healthy replacement organs. She tirelessly searches for her model to comprehend her own reactions and to gain deeper insight. Despite her awareness of being a clone, she had no mother being genetically engineered to be infertile, and knowing that her completion was inevitable, she still had a glimpse into her future.

I get these really strong feelings when I want to have sex. [...] That's why I started thinking, well, it has to come from somewhere. It must be to do with the way I am....So I thought if I find her picture, in one of those magazines, it'll at least explain it. I wouldn't want to go and find her or anything.... Why I am the way I am. 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. (110)

Nonetheless, her profound realization of being a clone always took precedence over her emotions and autonomy. She shows no resistance and embraces her fate. As she gets ready to transition from a caregiver to an organ donor, she contemplates her brief existence with complete awareness and acceptance of her imminent as she explains, "I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be" (149).

Moreover, *Never Let Me Go* raises questions about the essence of identity and how it is shaped by one's circumstances. As the characters navigate their existence within the confines of their predetermined fate, they struggle with questions of individuality, agency, and the search for meaning in a world that denies them a future. Ishiguro's exploration of these themes is both eerie and contemplative, forcing readers to reflect upon the nuances of human existence and the impact of societal structures on personal identity.

Additionally, the novel delves into the ethical implications of science and technology, particularly in relation to the creation and treatment of the clones. Ishiguro invites readers to contemplate the moral boundaries that are crossed in the pursuit of scientific advancement, challenging us to question the ethical ramifications of manipulating and exploiting human life for the benefit of others.

Understanding the concept of proletariats in literature is essential to fully grasp the underlying themes and social commentary presented in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. Derived from the Marxist philosophy, the term "proletariat" refers to the working class individuals who possess little to no means of production and are often subject to exploitation by the ruling class.

In literature, the portrayal of proletariats serves as a critique of societal structures and power dynamics. These characters are often depicted as marginalized, oppressed, and stripped of agency, reflecting the struggles faced by the working class in reality.

Ishiguro's portrayal of the clones as proletariats raises profound questions about identity, humanity, and the ethical implications of science and technology. Through their experiences, the author forces readers to confront the ethical dilemmas surrounding the treatment of marginalized individuals, challenging the very essence of what it means to be human. By delving into the concept of proletariats in literature, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the socio-political themes explored in *Never Let Me Go*. Ishiguro's portrayal of the clones as members of the working class serves as a touching reminder to scrutinize the power imbalances and disparities in our society, urging us to strive for a more equitable and just future.

Ishiguro adeptly conveys the struggles of the proletariats through the perspective of the protagonist, Kathy H., as she navigates the harsh realities of her existence. The author evokes a sense of empathy and compassion for these characters, highlighting the injustices they face and the limitations imposed on their lives. The portrayal of proletariats in the novel reflects the stark contrast between the haves and the have-nots, magnifying the social and economic disparities that exist in the fictional world. Through this portrayal, Ishiguro prompts readers to question the ethics of a society that exploits and sacrifices a group of individuals for the betterment of others.

The impact of this dystopian society on the proletariats is multifaceted and deeply disturbing. Firstly, they are denied any sense of individuality or identity. Their lives are predetermined and their futures are predetermined by their purpose as organ donors. They are constantly reminded of their status as "carers" and "donors," reducing them to mere objects rather than human beings.

Additionally, Kathy possessed a social role as a "carer," merely indicating her membership in a specific group. Within Hailsham School, being labeled a "carer" meant that she was tasked with caring for other "donors" who were nearing their "completion". It explains that she had a "cognitive entity that is meaningful to the individual at a particular point of time" (Ogden 62).

Likewise, her enrollment at Hailsham School significantly shapes her sense of belonging to a group. While at Hailsham, she comes to understand the purpose of her existence and gains a profound awareness of the world surrounding her. "This means that individuals do not primarily act, or are perceived as individuals, but as members of distinct social groups" (Tajfel 36).

Tommy, another central clone character, embraces a postmodern approach when it comes to shaping his sense of self. He possesses a distinct viewpoint and, through his reasoning, arrives at the idea that he doesn't necessarily need to form his identity based on the individual he was cloned from. Tommy places importance on his autonomy and firmly believes that a clone's identity isn't influenced by the characteristics or behavior of their "original" looks like or acts like, and he claims:

Our models were an irrelevance, a technical necessity for bringing us into the world, nothing more than that. It was up to each of us to make of our lives what we could, [...] Our models, what they were like, that's nothing to do with us, Kath. It's just not worth getting upset about. (176)

The existence of clones is marked by a blend of mutual reliance and personal choices, forming the core of their being. Clones depend on their original models solely for technical reasons; without the model, a clone cannot come into existence. Nevertheless, once brought into being, they must lead independent lives, and there is no doubt that cloned individuals will never encounter their "possible" counterpart.

Tommy's artwork conveys a sense of being mass-produced, mechanized, dehumanized, insignificant, and confined, preventing a connection with the reality of Hailsham. He perceives himself more as a collection of valuable organs than a complete human being composed of both body and soul. Consequently, he portrays himself as vulnerable, reliant on assistance, and self-absorbed in order to preserve his identity. This serves as the underlying source of his outbursts of anger throughout his life, from his days as a Hailsham student to his adulthood at the Cottages, during his time as a donor, and until his eventual completion.

Ruth, another clone, initially harbored curiosity about her 'possible' and aspired to have a meaningful career as she grew older. However, once she fully comprehended her identity as a human clone, she willingly offered her organs, stating, 'I was pretty much ready when I became a donor. It felt right. After all, it's what we're supposed to be doing, isn't it?' (269). Although it may appear irrational to the reader, she executed her intentions as she saw fit in her perspective on life. She believed that becoming a donor didn't signify failure or surrender; rather, it felt like she had finally achieved the societal objective set for her – the fulfillment of her mission.

In this dystopian society, the proletariats are subjected to physical and emotional exploitation. They are strictly monitored, and their every move is controlled. Their bodies are treated as commodities, with no regard for their pain or suffering. They are routinely subjected to medical procedures, often left physically and emotionally scarred.

The psychological impact of living in a dystopian society is also evident. The proletariats are conditioned to accept their fate and not question the system, creating a sense of resignation and hopelessness. They are denied the opportunity to dream, to aspire, or to have any control over their own lives. This constant suppression of their hopes and desires leads to a profound sense of despair and resignation.

Through Ishiguro's vivid descriptions, he forces readers to confront the dehumanization and deterioration of these individuals who are trapped in a society that values their lives as disposable. The impact of this dystopia on the proletariats serves as a powerful critique of the inherent inequality and exploitation present in such societies, leaving readers with a lingering sense of unease and a call to question the ethical implications of our own world.

The dehumanization of the proletariats is evident from the very beginning, as they are stripped of their individual identities and reduced to mere objects, existing solely to serve the needs of others. They are raised in isolated institutions, deprived of a normal childhood, and conditioned to believe that their purpose in life is to sacrifice themselves for the improvement of society. Their emotions, dreams, and desires are disregarded, as they are treated as disposable commodities rather than sentient beings.

The "privileged" individuals, who benefit from the organs harvested from the clones, maintain their positions of authority and luxury at the expense of these marginalized individuals. The proletariats are subjected to rigorous medical procedures and live in constant fear of their inevitable "donations," as their lives are dictated by a system that values their organs over their humanity. Ishiguro masterfully illustrates the harrowing consequences of dehumanization and exploitation through his evocative storytelling. He challenges readers to confront the ethical questions surrounding the treatment of marginalized groups in society and prompts us to reflect on the potential consequences of devaluing human life for the sake of scientific progress or societal advancement.

The contrast in opportunities and quality of life between the two classes leads to the gradual deterioration of the proletariats. As the clones grow older and begin their "donations," it becomes apparent that they are viewed as disposable objects, stripped of their humanity and basic rights. They are subjected to medical procedures without consent or consideration for their well-being, highlighting the devaluation of their lives due to their lower social status.

Furthermore, the practice of organ donation itself raises questions about the moral boundaries of medical science and the commodification of human life. The clones in *Never Let Me Go* are treated as "spare parts," their organs harvested and transplanted into "normal" individuals without their consent or consideration for their well-being. This raises ethical dilemmas surrounding the value placed on one life over another and the ethical responsibilities of society towards those who are deemed expendable.

The novel also reveals the power dynamics at play in the treatment of proletariats. The clones exist solely to serve the needs of the ruling class, who exploit their labor and sacrifice their lives for their own benefit. This portrayal of class division and exploitation serves as a critique of societal structures that perpetuate inequality and marginalize certain groups for the benefit of others.

The novel addresses the theme of social inequality, highlighting how power dynamics perpetuate the marginalization of proletariats. The clones in *Never Let Me Go* are confined to isolated institutions, separated from the rest of society. Their limited opportunities for education, personal growth, and social mobility mirror the struggles faced by those trapped in cycles of poverty and limited access to resources in our own world. Ishiguro's portrayal challenges us to question the inherent injustices that perpetuate systemic inequality and hinder the upward mobility of marginalized communities. The psychological impact on the proletariats is deeply ingrained in their subconscious. They are conditioned to stifle their desires, dreams, and aspirations to fulfill their designated role as organ donors. This suppression of individuality fosters a sense of resignation and hopelessness, dampening their spirits and rendering them mere cogs in an unforgiving system. Kathy, the narrator of the story, frequently reflects on her identity and the purpose of her existence. She questions the meaning of her life and ponders whether there is more to her existence than serving as a vessel for organ donations. This inner struggle for identity is compounded by her relationships with Ruth and Tommy, as they navigate their shared experiences and confront the harsh realities of their lives.

Ruth, in contrast, strongly desires to establish her individuality and uniqueness. She seeks validation and acknowledgment from others, ceaselessly endeavoring to set herself apart from the other clones. However, this pursuit often leads her down a path of deceit and manipulation, underscoring the profound need for a sense of identity and purpose.

Tommy, characterized by his artistic talents, finds solace in creativity and self-expression. His artwork becomes an outlet for his emotions and a means to assert his individuality in a world determined to suppress it. Nevertheless, his struggle to find meaning in his life is palpable, as he grapples with the idea of his art having a larger purpose beyond the confines of their bleak existence.

The students' incapacity to question their circumstances solidifies their status as a lower class within the society's ideological hierarchy. This status bears similarities to the proletariat in capitalist societies, as defined by Marx and Engels: "The class that constitutes the dominant material force in society simultaneously constitutes the ruling intellectual force." (Marx and Engels, 2004, p. 64).

Kathy's inquiries delve into the mechanisms of suppressing individuality, ultimately revealing how effectively the agents of social control indoctrinate the students, gradually diminishing their self-worth. These characters feel entirely devoid of self-value, lacking not only ownership of material possessions but even of their own bodies.

In conclusion, Ishiguro underscores how Kathy, as a member of the working class, grapples with the consequences of an ideology that dictates her existence solely for organ donation. This narrative aligns with Marxist concepts, highlighting a clear class divide and the dominance of the intellectual elite who manipulate societal structures to their advantage.

Ishiguro effectively portrays this theme through the establishment of Hailsham, showcasing the extent of social class segregation and the exploitation of the working class.

Furthermore, Ishiguro uses his characters to emphasize the powerlessness of the working class in society, highlighting the recurring success of the intellectual elite in exploiting them. Through *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro accentuates the extremes of capitalism, particularly within the confines of Hailsham, shedding light on broader economic disparities and the misuse of power by the upper class.

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