

**Cloning as a Reflection of the Outlook on Society and Mankind: A
Comparison Between the Fictional Dystopias in Aldous Huxley's *Brave
New World* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go***

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Introduction

In the vast field of narrative fiction, throughout history, literature can always be seen as representative of the era and society in which it is written. Regardless of whether the plot is set in the present, a distant past, a century into the future or in a parallel universe

that essentially only exists in fiction, the author, consciously or sub-consciously, comments upon various aspects of contemporary life. In most cases, our understanding of the author's contemporary society is subsidiary to the main plot and themes in the novel, so that the specific time period and place only become relevant as contextual references in our reading. Meanwhile, some authors manage to saliently illustrate their coeval situations, making their work a type of documentation of problems and actualities in their societies. This is, indeed, true for the narrative of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). Although Huxley's novel is set in a future England, the fictional society he presents is disturbingly similar to the inter-war society in which he wrote it. Similarly, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) by and large mirrors the actual late twentieth-century England that it was written in, despite the fact that its fictional world is presented as an alternative and speculative version of that setting. Even though *Never Let Me Go* belongs to the category of novels where the focus lies on the characters and the plot rather than the social setting and its connection to the actual world, the parallel between real society and Ishiguro's fictional one is prominent. Accordingly, *Brave New World* and *Never Let Me Go* coincide in that they are both classified as a part of the Science Fiction genre as their settings differ from our own world where science has made a great leap forward, and in that they make quite obvious allusions to Huxley's and Ishiguro's own eras in terms of the outlook on humankind with its prospects and fears for the future.¹

Meanwhile, what sets these two works apart from many other Science Fiction novels commenting upon their own society is the aspect of cloning. Both novels present a world where the cloning of humans has become a natural part of everyday life and where these clones play a vital part in keeping society afloat. In Huxley's novel, which concerns the futuristic society of the World State, the clones have actually become the norm and are, apart from a number of viviparously born savages living in reserves, the only people inhabiting earth. They have all been conditioned to fill certain roles in society and are, thus, vital gears in the totalitarian machine. Presenting this aspect in a different manner from *Brave New World*, *Never Let Me Go* depicts the clones as the outsiders of society. The reader gets to follow the narrator, Kathy, as she reminisces about her childhood in an institution named Hailsham and her life thereafter. As the story progresses, we learn that the children at Hailsham are in fact clones whose sole purpose in life is to donate their organs to the normal population, which will

¹Definition of Science Fiction from *Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*, ed. by Jeff Prucher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 171.

subsequently lead to their dying around the age of thirty. Though the clones still play a very important part in Ishiguro's fictional Britain, they do not have the same normative status as those of *Brave New World*. Nevertheless, as will become evident in this essay, both novels present dystopias, or rather, utopian societies gone wrong, using the clones as a metaphor for the western homogeneous population governed by compelling social conventions and a sense that self-fulfilment cannot be achieved unless you follow these conventions.

What is striking in juxtaposing these two novels is that the societies and the view of man that they both depict and, to some extent, criticise, are discouragingly similar, even though more than seventy years elapsed between the publication of *Brave New World* and that of *Never Let Me Go*. My thesis is that if both *Brave New World* and *Never Let Me Go* can be proven to be representative of their own eras, i.e. the 1930s and the end of the twentieth century respectively, this would suggest that the outlook on society and mankind has not actually gone through very drastic changes in almost a century. It is crucial to point out that, in order to support this thesis, I will somewhat contradict what the authors themselves have expressed concerning their novels. As stated above, my thesis is based on the assumption that all texts comment on the societies in which they were written. The authors of these two works, however, claim to have done otherwise. In Huxley's analytical response to his own novel, *Brave New World Revisited*, published 27 years after *Brave New World*, he refers to his fictional dystopia as a "prophecy" of the future. In comparing it to George Orwell's nightmarish *1984* from 1948, he claims that whilst Orwell's novel primarily "was a magnified projection into the future of a present that had contained Stalinism and an immediate past that had witnessed the flowering of Nazism", his own work was a more plausible prediction of what society would look like in the future.² Nevertheless, I claim that, although Huxley's fictional society might indeed be understood as an indication of what might happen in the future, it is still, to the same extent as *1984*, "a magnified projection into the future of [the] present." Many critics would agree, questioning Huxley's standpoint, and saying, for example, that *Brave New World* is "about the science-obsessed and sex-obsessed early 20th century Britain".³ Coincidentally, Ishiguro has also somewhat

²Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), pp. 2-3.

³John R. Pfeiffer, "Aldous (Leonard) Huxley" in *Science Fiction Writers: Critical Studies of the Major Authors from the Early Nineteenth Century to the Present Day*, ed. by Everett Franklin Bleiler (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1982)

<http://go.galegroup.com/ludwig.lub.lu.se/ps/retrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=RELEVANCE&inPS=true&prodId=LitRG&userGroupName=lununi&tabID=T001&searchId=R1&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&contentSegment=&searchType=BasicSearchForm¤tPosition=1&contentSet=GALE%7CH1479000317&&docId=GALE|H1479000317&docType=GALE&role=Scribner> [Accessed 29 October 2009].

contradicted critics who claim that his work reflects late twentieth-century Britain, maintaining that “ultimately I’m not that interested in saying things about specific societies”.⁴ Thus, whilst I am aware that presenting a contemporary society and presenting a future or an alternative society, as in *Brave New World* and *Never Let Me Go*, need not necessarily exclude one another, I will somewhat disregard the works’ speculative qualities and mainly focus on their rootedness in their own times.

This essay endeavours to prove how these two novels can be said to mirror the England of the inter-war period and of the late twentieth to the early twenty-first centuries with a focus on how the cloning aspect has been used similarly by both authors. I will compare the societies that emerge in the works and show how they might be perceived as largely the same despite seventy years having elapsed between the publications of the two books. The argumentation will largely be based on how the novels reflect their coeval societies in terms of political climate, the re-emergence of the class system, the general view of mankind and technological advances. Based on my findings, I will also try to understand *why* the cloning aspect has been used to depict these dystopias.

Historical contexts

In order to claim that the outlook on society and humankind are alike in *Brave New World* and *Never Let Me Go*, on the basis that the societies in which they were written were similar, I first need to establish how these works can be interpreted individually as reflections of their times. Prior to this discussion, it is vital to understand that there is one significant difference between the metaphorical understanding of these two novels. Whilst *Brave New World* is universally acknowledged amongst critics to depict the conditions of Britain during the inter-war years with respect to fears of the socialist/communist movement in, primarily, Russia as well as a fear of technological advances and eugenics (see discussion below), *Never Let Me Go* has no obvious historical reference. However, this might have to do with the fact that Huxley’s novel is set in a future society that has supposedly arisen as a result from actual historical events

⁴Earl G. Ingersoll, “Taking off into the Realm of Metaphor: Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*” in *Studies in the Humanities* 34:1 (June 2007)

<http://go.galegroup.com/ludwig.lub.lu.se/ps/retrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=RELEVANCE&inPS=true&prodId=LitRG&userGroupName=lununi&tabID=T001&searchId=R1&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&contentSegment=&searchType=BasicSearchForm¤tPosition=1&contentSet=GALE%7CA172905570&&docId=GALE|A172905570&docType=GALE&role=LitRC> [Accessed 29 October 2009].

that can, hence, be referred to, whilst Ishiguro's novel is set in a speculative past, where the history that we know does not exist and therefore cannot be referred to.

Brave New World was published in 1932 during the inter-war years, a period that in Britain is characterised by industrial and technological advances, mass consumption, materialism and fear of the socialist/communist and fascist threat. Although the socialist and fascist movements in England never composed an actual threat to democracy, the political party of the British Union of Fascists (BUF), formed in the same year that Huxley published his novel, and socialist authors such as Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells, expressed their political standpoints.⁵ However, the greatest socialist influence by far in Britain came from Russia. This influence is displayed in Huxley's novel most prominently through the characters' names. Even though most of the characters do not actually epitomize the characteristics of the real-life people they are named after, it is still evident where Huxley got his inspiration. Many characters have names such as Lenina, Trotsky and Marx, clearly alluding to these politicians of the Soviet era. However, this does not necessarily prove that Huxley aimed to depict his own society; had Russian socialism had a greater impact on the rest of Europe than it ultimately did, these names might actually have been adopted, even by the Britons, justifying Huxley's use of them. Meanwhile, there are also characters, such as the Resident Controller for Western Europe, Mustapha Mond, who actually do possess qualities very similar to the real-life people they are named after, suggesting that parts of Huxley's work directly portray his own society.⁶ Another thing that points towards this suggestion is the application of Henry Ford and Sigmund Freud's ideas to Huxley's dystopia. Ford is viewed as a god in *Brave New World*, and his theories on human labour, as presented in his autobiography, *My Life and Work*, serve as the basis for all of the clones' existence. Similarly, Freud's theories on suppressed sexuality and the Oedipus Complex have been adopted in the work to guide the clones sexually.⁷ As Huxley made it no secret that he was critical of both Ford and Freud's theories, it is not absurd to argue that rather than Huxley actually believing that these theories would remain as important centuries into the future as they were at his own time, he was actually trying to satirize the work of

⁵Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), pp. 1-6.

⁶Mustapha Mond shares many traits with the prominent British industrialist-politician Sir Alfred Mond, whose theories on rationalization had a great impact on the outlook of industries during the late 1920s. See James Sexton's article "Brave New World and the Rationalization of Industry" in *Critical Essays on Aldous Huxley*, ed. by Jerome Meckier (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996), 88-102 (p. 93).

⁷See Brad Buchanan's "Oedipus in Dystopia: Freud and Lawrence in Aldous Huxley's Brave New World" in *Journal of Modern Literature* 25:3-4 (Summer 2002), 75-89, <http://muse.jhu.edu.ludwig.lub.lu.se/journals/journal_of_modern_literature/v025/25.3buchanan.pdf > [Accessed 9 November 2009] (p. 77).

these two men. In view of the discussion above, it can be concluded that Huxley's work can indeed be interpreted as a magnified projection of his present, as much as it can be read as a prediction of the future.

As explained above, the task of showing how *Never Let Me Go* can be read as reflective of its own society is somewhat harder than it is with *Brave New World*. This is mainly because Ishiguro's novel has very few concrete references to real-life contemporary Britain, or rather, the Britain of the 1970s to 1990s in which it is set. However, in an interview from 2006, Ishiguro explains that when he began writing *Never Let Me Go* in the beginning of the 1990s, the cloning aspect was not yet intended to be a part of the novel; instead, he "was looking for a story to do with nuclear weapons and a cold war mentality. They [the students] came across some kind of nuclear whatever and their lives were doomed".⁸ Although Ishiguro later abandoned the cold war aspect in favour of the cloning, it has obviously remained present in the novel, but on a subsidiary level, where the clones' inevitable destiny might represent the threat of the atomic bomb.

The loss of individuality

Universally, cloning signals the creation of an exact replica from an original source, thus depriving both the clone and the original of their uniqueness. In literature this makes for a very good metaphor; the ultimate sign that individualism has been lost. It is appropriate that Huxley and Ishiguro should use this metaphor, as the fear of losing one's self pervade both their societies. In Huxley's 1930s England, the rationalization of industries with its rapid technological advances, including Ford's assembly line, made the industries grow and the need for specialised professional knowledge decrease. Many people that had come to identify with their jobs became unemployed, and those lucky enough to get employed by the industries came to identify with a job that needed no previous experience or skills. Hence, the homogeneous workforce that sprung from the expanded industrialization was largely replaceable.⁹ In much the same manner, Britain of the 1970s to late 1990s, led for most of the time by the Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, was marked by widespread unemployment. The lower classes were hit hardest and became a neglected group in many other areas of society. In

⁸Cynthia F. Wong and Grace Crummet, "A Conversation about Life and Art with Kazuo Ishiguro" in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, ed. by Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 204-20 (p. 211).

⁹Sean Glynn and Alan Booth, *Modern Britain: An Economic and Social History* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 53.

addition to losing their jobs, the underprivileged classes had little governmental representation, both of which contributed to their alienation from society and, to some extent, a loss in their means of identification.¹⁰ Evidently, the clones make up a suitable metaphor for these groups, but Huxley and Ishiguro have both, in similar ways, gone beyond this metaphor in order to enhance the sense of lost individuality.

The first aspect that comes to mind when contemplating an individual is the name. When this means of identification is taken away or, in any way, subdued, a part of that person's identity is lost. In *Brave New World* and *Never Let Me Go* this is one of the means the authors have used to convey the clones' loss of uniqueness. In Huxley's novel, the clones have not been completely deprived of the right to have a name, but the reader soon becomes aware that it is not an aspect that could define them as unique. When central character Lenina Crowne meets her friend Fanny in the locker room, the matter of the names is explained: "Fanny worked in the Bottling Room, and her surname was also Crowne. But as the two thousand million inhabitants of the planet had only ten thousand names between them, the coincidence was not particularly surprising".¹¹ The leaders of *Brave New World* seem to have systematically named the clones, giving them only a few names between them, and in eliminating this choice of a name for the new-born clones by a parent or someone who is emotionally attached to it, they manage to somewhat suppress their development as unique individuals. Considering the lower castes of Huxley's society, i.e. the Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons, it is not only the matter of names that restricts their development as unique individuals. Many of them have also been cloned through what is called "Bokanovsky's Process." This means that the clones have been created in batches:

One egg, one embryo, one adult – normality. But a Bokanovskified egg will bud, will proliferate, will divide. From eight to ninety-six buds, and every bud will grow into a perfectly formed embryo, and every embryo into a full-sized adult. Making ninety-six human beings grow where only one would grow before. Progress.¹²

So the lower-caste clones are not only deprived of unique names, but also of a unique appearance. The method used to oppress the clones of *Brave New World* is similar to the

¹⁰A good example of this unemployment and lack of representation is the miners' strike, during which the union eventually turned its back on the workers. This resulted in the virtual end to deep coal-mining, which caused massive unemployment amongst the miners. See Andrew Marr's *A History of Modern Britain* (London: Pan Books, 2008), pp. 411-16.

¹¹Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, org. publ. 1932 (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006) p. 36.

¹²Ibid, p. 6.

master suppression techniques used in concentration camps during World War II, which were used not only to degrade the prisoners, but also to remove what signified them as individuals.¹³

Furthermore, the awareness that the clones have of being completely replaceable in Huxley's novel contributes to their acceptance of themselves as parts of a standardized society in which individualization is not encouraged. As it is constantly asserted that that "every one belongs to every one else", the clones gain no sense of self value as they are not even in possession of their own lives and bodies.¹⁴ The reason for this is to keep society from being corrupted:

The greater a man's talents, the greater his power to lead astray. It is better that one should suffer than that many should be corrupted. Consider the matter dispassionately [...] and you will see that no offence is so heinous as unorthodoxy of behaviour. Murder kills only the individual – and, after all, what is an individual? [...] We can make a new one with the greatest ease – as many as we like. Unorthodoxy threatens more than the life of a mere individual; it strikes at Society itself. Yes, at Society itself.¹⁵

In brief, this clarifies that the clones should not have any sense of individuality, as it would overturn the development of society. This complete disregard for the individual and free choice fosters a society of people reconciled with the fact that they are, virtually, worthless on their own.

In *Never Let Me Go*, as in *Brave New World*, Ishiguro's clones, or students, as they are called, have not been given unique names either. However, whilst Huxley's clones share their names with many others, the clones in *Never Let Me Go* have not been given surnames at all, but only an initial. The students at the Hailsham institution, have names such as Kathy H., Carole H., and Tommy D. Although the naming of the clones does not work in quite the same manner in this novel as in Huxley's, the same point is made. The clones do not have a family name as they have no family, which is one of the most important environmental factors in shaping an identity.¹⁶ Not having a proper family

¹³The dehumanisation process of the captives in the concentration camps during WWII aimed at depriving the subjects of all symbols of human dignity. To achieve this, the captives were reduced to numbers in Germany's bureaucratic statistics, and bereft of even a recognisable human shape. See Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), pp. 102-104.

¹⁴Huxley, *Brave New World*, p. 40.

¹⁵Huxley, *Brave New World*, p. 148.

¹⁶Daniel Cervone and Lawrence A. Pervin, *Personality: Theory and Research* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008), p. 19.

forces the students to create their own identity from scratch, making them a rather homogeneous group as they all have the same upbringing and education.

However, the students at Hailsham have had an advantage to clones brought up in other institutions when it comes to developing their individuality. We find out, towards the end, that Hailsham was an experimental institution that aimed at encouraging the students' creativity in order to prove to the rest of the world that clones are individuals with souls too, and that clones in other institutions are "reared in deplorable conditions".¹⁷ The students are encouraged by their guardians, i.e. tutors, to make art that can be sold to other students and then put in their "collections" of artwork and things that they have accumulated during their upbringing at Hailsham. According to Leona Toker and Daniel Chertoff, this "fosters a sense of active construction of one's individuality because the things purchased are kept in personal 'collection baskets' intended to reflect each student's tastes, emotional needs, and attempt at self definition".¹⁸ Thus, the Hailsham students have actually been given some means to construct their own unique individuality, but it is quite clear that there are still many factors missing for them.

What soon becomes evident when studying the book more closely, is that parents are one of the major factors missing. As previously stated, the family is part of a person's means of forming an identity, where parents are particularly important in functioning as role models. This is evident throughout the novel. In the beginning, the students wish to have the attention of certain guardians they look up to, and as they grow older they start wondering about the people from whom they were cloned, whom they call their "possibles". One striking example of this is when Kathy flips through a couple of porn magazines in the hope of finding that she was cloned from one of the models, which she then thinks would explain why her sex drive is so strong: "I wouldn't want to go and find her or anything. It would just, you know, kind of explain why I am the way I am".¹⁹ This illustrates the students' need to identify with someone in order to define themselves, proving that they do not have all the means necessary to properly form an identity.

Thus, the clones of both *Brave New World* and of *Never Let Me Go* are reared in societies that suppress their free will and subdue the growth of individuality, which shapes them into creatures of conformity. Their societies see no point in treating them

¹⁷Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005) p. 255.

¹⁸Leona Toker and Daniel Chertoff, "Reader Response and the Recycling of Topoi in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 6:1 (2008), 163-80, <http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/partial_answers/v006/6.1toker.html> [Accessed 23 April 2009].

¹⁹Ishiguro, p. 179.

as individuals when, ultimately, they are only viewed as means to forward society's development and the well-being of those higher up on the social scale. Toker and Chertoff describes this as Huxley translating "the rigidities of the British class system into a social stratification based on innate or artificially controlled IQ levels", whilst "Ishiguro's protagonists are clones whose intelligence is unimportant because they have been created merely as organ banks".²⁰ However, this dispossession of the means of defining a person as an individual cannot be effected without undermining the free will of the clones, to make them believe that the sacrifice of individuality must be done for the good of society. In the two novels, this is done through subconscious programming and classical conditioning of the clones.

Conditioning and sacrifice for the good of society

The discovery of classical conditioning was made by Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov through his experiments on dogs in the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. In a nutshell, his experiments proved that through influencing or training a human or an animal, you can eventually make it think or behave in any manner you find desirable, to the extent that the reaction eventually occurs as a subconscious reflex.²¹ In *Brave New World*, Huxley has captured the essence of the importance in using this conditioning on the clones: "that is the secret of happiness and virtue – liking what you've got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny".²² It is precisely this conditioning that makes the clones accept that their development as individuals is irrelevant as, ultimately, they only exist for the good of society. Although both Huxley and Ishiguro account for the subconscious programming of the clones, they present it in different ways: whilst the conditioning in Huxley's novel is very outspoken and portrayed in detail, it is depicted rather indirectly in *Never Let Me Go*.

The representation of conditioning in *Brave New World* originates in Huxley's concern that the state and the world leaders were gaining too much power and had too much influence over society as a whole. He expresses this concern in a letter to Dr Humphry Osmond in 1957, stating that "Now that the dictators are equipped with systematic knowledge of the ways in which brain functions can be disturbed, so as to

²⁰Toker and Chertoff.

²¹Cervone, pp. 380-81.

²²Huxley, 1932, p. 16.

facilitate deconditioning and reconditioning, I really see very little hope for our unfortunate species”, and concluding that this would “rob the individual of the last shred of free will”.²³ At the time when Huxley wrote his novel, the greatest resource that the state and the world leaders had to use in order to influence their population, in terms of conditioning, was propaganda. This is represented in the work by hypnopaedia, i.e. sleep conditioning. Apart from being used to indoctrinate the clones from a very young age by short exhortations on, for example, increasing consumption and taking the drug soma whenever you have feelings of discomfort, the hypnopaedia is also used to reinforce their sense of belonging in their castes and, thus, to prevent mixing with other castes. This can be seen during the lesson in Elementary Class Consciousness for the sleeping Beta children, where a soft distinct voice under every pillow assures them that their caste is, indeed, the best, and that the other castes are either too clever or too stupid to fraternize with. The Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning, who is guiding a group of students through the different stages in the conditioning centre, then explains that the children will have these suggestions repeated until

at last the child’s mind *is* these suggestions, and the sum of the suggestions *is* the child’s mind. And not the child’s mind only. The adult’s mind too – all his life long. The mind that judges and desires and decides – made up of these suggestions. But all these suggestions are *our* suggestions! [...] Suggestions from the State.²⁴

This in its turn, leads to every clone growing up to understand that his own social destiny is the ideal one, and to every clone being incapable of expressing personal opinions or judgements as these, in fact, do not exist.²⁵

However, hypnopaedia is not the only way in which the conditioning is expressed in the novel. There is also the typical classical conditioning, referred to as Neo-Pavlovian conditioning. This is best illustrated when, during the Director’s guidance of the students, a group of infants are being observed by nurses as they receive electrical shocks every time they try to pick up or play with the flowers or books they are shown.²⁶ Through this conditioning, the clones learn to associate nature and reading with pain and, effectively, shun it for the rest of their lives. As a result, the society in

²³Aldous Huxley, “772: To Dr Humphry Osmond” in *Letters of Aldous Huxley* ed. by Grover Smith (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), 821-823 (pp. 822-23).

²⁴Huxley, *Brave New World*, p. 27.

²⁵Harold H. Watts, “Chapter 4: Brave New World” in *Aldous Huxley* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), 72-84, <http://fsweb.bainbridge.edu/rgingras/eng_1102/AldousHuxley.pdf> [Accessed 24 January 2010] (p. 77).

²⁶Huxley, *Brave New World*, pp. 20-21.

Brave New World becomes a highly standardized one where the efficiency of labour and consumption govern, and intellectual stimulation and appreciation of nature are completely disregarded. Although the population in England of the 1930s were not actually conditioned into this change of attitude, it can be understood as a depiction of the urbanisation and industrialisation of British society during the 1920s, which paved way for new popular forms of consumption, leisure and entertainment, pushing the old, more intellectual forms of leisure into the dark.²⁷

In *Never Let Me Go*, the use of conditioning on the clones is never outspoken, but as it is not understood that the students are actually clones who will donate their organs until a good way into the novel, we, as readers, appreciate that some kind of manipulation of language has been effected order to suspend this insight for so long. It eventually becomes evident that the narrator has known since she was very young that she was a clone and that her sole purpose of existence is to donate her organs, but the fact that the reader does not quite understand that until roughly one third into the novel points to a reluctance in spelling it out loud. This reluctance gets its explanation in the recurring theme of the clones being “told and not told” about their situation. Kathy explains this when reminiscing about an event that occurred when she and her friends were eight:

Thinking back now, I can see we were just at that age when we knew a few things about ourselves – about who we were, how we were different from our guardians, from the people outside – but hadn’t yet understood what any of it meant. [...]
Because it doesn’t really matter how well your guardians try to prepare you: all the talks, videos, discussions, warnings, none of that can really bring it home.²⁸

This inability to understand their inevitable fate is not only rooted in the fact that the students are too young to fully grasp the concept of donating their organs, but also in the guardians’ approach to the concept when discussing it with the clones.

When contemplating the language that is used in connection with the clones and their organ donations, it is striking that the actual words “clone” and “organ donation” rarely come up. Just the fact that the clones in *Never Let Me Go* are always referred to as students rather than clones points to a depreciation of their situation. Also, as Keith McDonald explains:

The children (or captives) are described as “special” and “gifted” by their guardians

²⁷Glynn, p. 10.

²⁸Ishiguro, p. 36.

(or wardens), and their murders are described as “completions,” a jarring reminder of their sole purpose in the eyes of society, and of the ways in which language can normalize atrocities deemed necessary in a given ideology.²⁹

This manipulation of terminology is used as a kind of conditioning to make the clones look forward to donating their organs to complete strangers without any questioning of this inhumane solution to the scarceness of transplantable organs.³⁰ Especially the term “completion” suggests that the clones should take pride in their death, as it alludes to having completed what one was born to do. Put in the context of Ishiguro’s own era, this sacrifice for society’s good can be seen as a metaphor for the sacrifice of soldiers in wars, where the soldiers are often brainwashed to gain a war mentality, making them take pride in dying for their country. This is not only because of the work’s presumed allusions to the Cold War, but also because when *Never Let Me Go* was published in 2005, the war in Iraq was very much on the agenda.

In short, Huxley and Ishiguro have incorporated the use of conditioning in their works in order to make the clones accept their predestined life, and to make them take pride in the work they were created to do. In the societies’ usage of conditioning, they have eliminated the clones’ will to fight and escape the system, and should they have these feelings anyway, the system has a way to put an end to it. In *Brave New World*, whenever the clones have feelings of discomfort, or start contemplating the things that society has fought so hard to subdue, such as literature, they have been conditioned to take the drug Soma, enabling them to escape reality for a while. Should the feelings persist, the state has created an island where the clones on whom conditioning has not had the desired effect are sent in order to prevent their influencing the rest of the population. In *Never Let Me Go*, when, at one point, the clones discuss amongst each other what they would like to be when they grow up, they are immediately told off by a guardian, asserting that they can never be anything other than what they have been created for. Thus, whilst the way in which conditioning is used in the two novels differs quite considerably, the effects that the societies achieve from it are largely the same, indicating that there are similarities between the ways in which mankind was viewed at the times when the novels were written.

²⁹Keith McDonald, “Days of Past Futures: Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* as ‘Speculative Memoir’” in *Biography*, 30:1 (Winter, 2007), 74-83, <<http://muse.jhu.edu.ludwig.lub.lu.se/journals/biography/v030/30.1mcdonald.pdf>> [accessed 28 October 2009] (p. 78)

³⁰Ingersoll.

Fears and threats

Like most other dystopian works, such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, *Brave New World* and *Never Let Me Go* epitomise the fears and threats of society at the time when they were written. As stated in the introduction, the works' speculative qualities are not relevant for this essay, i.e. what the authors might propose society would look like in the future, had the impending threats of their respective historical periods been realised, but as the fears that society faced during both the 1930s and the late twentieth century were in many ways similar, their representation in the novels can be expected to appear in a similar way. Also, whether the threats were realised or not, the threats were still very much present and influenced people's approach to life, making them very much a part of contemporary society.

The inter-war society of Huxley's England showed signs of increased social tension and the class conflicts appeared to become more violent and intense. Not only did England suffer greatly from the depression and unemployment, but after the end of WWI in 1918, the Cabinet faced the threat of a revolution as well as lengthy turmoil in the industrial relations. Moreover, the general strike was seen by some as a threat to the constitution.³¹ In *Brave New World* these fears and threats have not been presented through their actual realization, but through what the state has done to undermine these tendencies. As previously explained, the way in which the state undermines the clones' free will is through conditioning, and the reasons for doing this is concretely explained in the resolution of the novel, when John, the savage, confronts Mustapha Mond about why civilization has eliminated all beautiful and old art for society to enjoy. Mond asserts that the plays of Shakespeare, of which the savage speaks so fondly, could not possibly be understood by the clones of the state, as tragedies cannot occur without social instability:

The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. They're well off; they're safe; they're never ill; they're not afraid of death; they're blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they're plagued with no mothers or fathers; they've got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they're so conditioned that they practically can't help behaving as they ought to behave.³²

³¹Glynn, p. 39.

³²Huxley, *Brave New World*, p. 220.

In essence, the state has eliminated all factors that could possibly contribute to social instability in order to subdue society and prevent their fears and threats from becoming a reality. As Harold H. Watts expresses it: “In Mond’s judgment, tragedy does not arise from man’s situation; it once arose from the instability of a particular situation – one that in the new society has been erased”.³³ Indeed, *Brave New World* can be read as Huxley’s critique against the state’s handling of the threats they faced during the inter-war era. He has himself stated that “Too much organization transforms men and women into automata, suffocates the creative spirit and abolishes the very possibility of freedom”, arguing that whilst organization is indispensable, too much of it will be fatal for society.³⁴

Meanwhile, the rise and, subsequently, the fear of eugenics during the inter-war years in England have also had a great impact on the outcome of Huxley’s novel, which is primarily reflected in his utilization of the cloning aspect. From the theories of Nietzsche on the concept of creating an “übermensch” (superhuman) sprung the ideas of refining the human race through eugenics during the earliest decades of the twentieth century.³⁵ In Britain, much of the stress of these ideas lay on social class rather than on race, furthering the class ruptures. This threatened primarily the “emerging working class clamouring for rights” and the “still dominant old élite” of the higher classes as these were viewed as “unproductive and parasitic classes” by eugenicists.³⁶ In *Brave New World*, the type of selective breeding that eugenicists promoted is brilliantly symbolized by the clones and their caste system. As is explained in the novel’s first chapter, the less oxygen the embryos are supplied with while in their incubators, the lower the caste they will belong to when they are decanted, as the oxygen-shortage will decrease the embryos’ level of intelligence.³⁷ Thus, the clones’ social class is decided even before it is decanted, i.e. born, through this process of selection, which was also the aim of British eugenicists. Moreover, Huxley has depicted the involuntary sterilization that the “inferior” classes of society were subjected to as a result of the penetrating power of the eugenics:

in the vast majority of cases, fertility is merely a nuisance. One fertile ovary in twelve hundred – that would really be quite sufficient for our purposes. But we want to have a good choice. [...] So we allow as many as thirty per cent of the

³³Watts, p. 80.

³⁴Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited*, p. 22.

³⁵Stone, p. 62.

³⁶Ibid, pp. 94-95.

³⁷Huxley, *Brave New World*, pp. 14-15.

female embryos to develop normally. The others get a dose of male sex-hormone every twenty-four metres for the rest of the course. Result: they're decanted as freemartins – structurally quite normal [...], but sterile. Guaranteed sterile.³⁸

As hinted at in the novel, the fertile women who are encouraged to donate their eggs to make new clones are those of the higher castes who possess the physical traits deemed desirable, such as the “pneumatic” Lenina. This quite evidently refers to the selective sterilization in Britain of “degenerates” discarded as unfit to pass down their genes in the beginning of the 1900s.³⁹ Huxley’s take on eugenics in *Brave New World* may well be rooted in his own worries concerning the subject, which arose during his years at Oxford University, where “the idea of eugenics, for the purpose of perpetuating an intellectual aristocracy, was being argued”.⁴⁰ Hence, the clones of *Brave New World* serve not only to reflect the general take on eugenics during the inter-war years, but also Huxley’s personal concerns regarding the subject.

In England during the late twentieth and the early twenty-first century, when Ishiguro wrote his novel, the threats that faced society and, more importantly, the state were, to a great extent, very similar to those they had had to face during the inter-war era. The economy was in a decline and unemployment as well as class consciousness rose explosively. Also, as in the 1920s, industrial relations became more strained when the unions lost much of their power due to the conservative government’s fear of their destabilising force.⁴¹ In *Never Let Me Go* this is not presented as concretely as in *Brave New World*. However, some matters that concerned England during the late twentieth century can actually be seen on a less outspoken level in Ishiguro’s novel. One example of this is the class consciousness, which is represented in the novel through the metaphorical understanding of the clones as the lower classes of real-life England. As in reality for the lower classes, the clones have little representation in terms of spokesmen who can defend their rights. The representation that they did have in Hailsham and its guardians, who actually believed in the clones’ individual value and their possession of a soul, have been discarded by the state at the end of the novel; the only institutions that remain are those which do not view the clones as human, but purely as organ banks. By the end, when Kathy and Tommy meet Madame and Miss Emily, two of the founders of Hailsham, to ask for deferrals for their organ donations, Miss Emily explains that the

³⁸Ibid, p. 13.

³⁹Stone, pp. 96-97.

⁴⁰David King Dunaway, “Huxley and Human Cloning: Brave New World in the Twenty-First Century” in *Aldous Huxley Annual: A Journal of Twentieth-Century Thought and Beyond*, Volume 2 (2002),165-179 (p. 167).

⁴¹Glynn, pp. 313-14.

institution has had to close down because of experiments conducted by a scientist who wanted to offer people the possibility of designing their own children with genetically enhanced characteristics:

It reminded people, reminded them of a fear they'd always had. It's one thing to create students, such as yourselves, for the donation programme. But a generation of 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.⁴²

It is possible to argue that Hailsham's being forced to give up their fight for the clones' rights could represent the lower-class struggle during Thatcher's regime, not only because of the union's defeat during the strikes, but also because of the privatization of companies, making the working-class suffer immensely.⁴³ The government's fear of being undermined by the working-class forces may be represented by Ishiguro's society's fear of being undermined by the clones, who, quite obviously, pose as representatives of the lower classes in *Never Let Me Go*.

However, if one chooses to read the novel more literally, *Never Let Me Go* can also be seen as portraying society's fear of the advancement in genetic engineering, i.e. the literal threat of being replaced by "superhumans". Whilst the novel should not be "(mis)read as merely a 'clone story,' or merely as 'speculative fiction'", it is an inevitable interpretation of the work.⁴⁴ As Ishiguro himself has explained, *Never Let Me Go* was in the process of being written from 1990, when he first thought of the story, until 2005, when he finished it.⁴⁵ During that period, in 1996, the world's first cloned animal, Dolly the sheep, was born. Immediately, this caused turmoil amongst the general public and scientists alike and induced a fear that this would destroy the very notion of the self.⁴⁶ Doubtlessly, this scientific breakthrough must have affected Ishiguro's approach to his novel. Although Ishiguro expressly did not wish to make a comment on his own society (see above), the fact that the fears society has regarding genetic engineering in his novel practically are the same as those of his real-life society points to a commentary on this fear being made, whether Ishiguro intended it to or not.

On the whole, the fears and threats that Huxley's and Ishiguro's societies had to face were basically the same: strikes threatening the social order, increased unemployment

⁴²Ishiguro, pp. 258-59.

⁴³Marr, pp. 428-33.

⁴⁴Ingersoll.

⁴⁵Wong, pp. 210-11.

⁴⁶Gina Kolata, *Clone: The Road to Dolly and the Path Ahead* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. 3-5.

and general turmoil in industrial relations. Meanwhile, the authors have presented them in different ways. Whilst Huxley largely has created his fictional dystopia as a society that is built around the constant suppression of the realisation of these fears and threats, Ishiguro has merely hinted at their existence. However, the authors have both used the cloning aspect in order to comment on the scientific advances threatening their respective real-life societies in their purported goals of creating a “superhuman”.

The search for a time that has passed

In both *Brave New World* and *Never Let Me Go* there is a sense of nostalgia; a wish, by some, for circumstances to be they way they were rather than embracing the present. So it is no coincidence that this sense of nostalgia was also very much present in England during both the inter-war era and the late twentieth century. Both these societies saw drastic changes in very short periods of time in terms of social circumstances and technological advances. Huxley’s era made great leaps forward in technology with, for example, the emergence of radio and cinema, bringing with it the “age of high mass consumption” which changed many people’s lives.⁴⁷ In Ishiguro’s England, the re-emergence of a segregated class system effected a pessimistic outlook on the future for the lower classes. In view of this, it is not hard to imagine that many people looked back nostalgically to a simpler past. The two authors have explored this idea through different means: Huxley has used the savage to represent this search for a time that has passed, and Ishiguro has thoroughly accounted for Kathy’s, as well as some of the others clones’, sense of nostalgia concerning their time at Hailsham.

In *Brave New World*, the Reservation, where John, the Savage, is found, represents “an alternative to the sterile consumer-society of ‘our Ford’”.⁴⁸ It serves as a reminder of what life once was. When brought back to civilization, John finds it very difficult to adapt to his new life. In a society “ordered solely by science, sex, and drugs” people have become “mere cattle”, and John’s savage ways may be preferable.⁴⁹ John finds himself wanting to go back to his old life, as in the civilized society, “Nothing costs enough”.⁵⁰ By the end, he chooses to move away from society, into an old lighthouse, where he indulges in self-discipline and purification, as was the custom in his old tribe

⁴⁷Glynn, pp. 28-29.

⁴⁸James D. Mulvihill, “A Source for Huxley’s ‘Savage Reservation’” in *Notes and Queries*, 31:1 (March, 1984), 83-84, <http://ida.lub.lu.se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/cgi-bin/oup_local/notesj/31_1/31-1-83.pdf> [Accessed 1 January 2010] (p. 83).

⁴⁹Pfeiffer.

⁵⁰Huxley, *Brave New World*, p. 239.

when one had committed a sin. On the last page, John hangs himself, as he is too disgusted with civilization to live on.⁵¹ The Savage might very well be understood as a metaphor for those in society who experienced a loss of themselves amidst the rapid technological advances and wished to go back to the old, simpler days. He could also be perceived as a representation of Huxley's own view of society. Although Huxley did not explicitly express that he wished society would go back to its more traditional ways, the fact that he was extremely critical of, for example, the rapid scientific advances and increased promiscuity of his time somewhat favours our understanding of him as a traditionalist who was nostalgic about the past.⁵²

In Ishiguro's novel, the simpler past that the clones wish to go back to is represented by Hailsham. This nostalgic way in which the students remember Hailsham remains throughout their short lives, as a romantic vision of a happier time. This is seen, for example, when the students first move out of Hailsham, into residences with other adolescent clones, where they bide their time while waiting to become donors or carers of donors. Their guardians have given the students essays to work on as a pastime while staying at these residences. Kathy explains that she and her friends did not think the essays were important at first, but once they arrived at the residences, the essays took on a new importance: "In our first day there, and for some of us a lot longer, it was like we were clinging to our essay, this last task from Hailsham, like it was a farewell gift from the guardians".⁵³ This clearly indicates the students' inability to let go of the past.

Moreover, this reluctance to cut the umbilical cord is also reflected in the title of Kathy's favourite song, "Never Let Me Go", which also serves as the title of the novel. When Kathy is quite young, she dances to the song holding a pillow like a baby, imagining that the song is about a woman who has been told that she cannot have babies: "But then she's had one, and she was so pleased, and she was holding it ever so tightly to her breast, really afraid something might separate them, and she's going baby, baby, never let me go".⁵⁴ Meanwhile, she is observed by Madame, who starts crying and then runs off. For a long time Kathy believes that Madame cried because she interpreted the song in the same way she did. However, as it turns out in the end, Madame was crying for a completely different reason:

⁵¹Ibid, p. 241-59.

⁵²See, for example, Huxley's essays "Science and Civilization" and "Sex, the Slump and Salvation" in *Aldous Huxley Between the Wars: Essays and Letters*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Chicago: Faber and Faber Limited, 1994), 105-14 and 127-31 respectively.

⁵³Ishiguro, p. 113.

⁵⁴Ibid, p. 266.

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 let her go.⁵⁵

As Toker and Chertoff explains, “the song’s refrain enhances the irony of Hailsham students’ *not wanting* to be released”.⁵⁶ In Ishiguro’s real-life society, this nostalgia or reluctance to let go, might be rooted in the Conservatives retrogressive politics, which harked back to the old traditional society.⁵⁷ Alternatively, and perhaps more likely, it could represent the working class’ memory of life in the 1960s and early 1970s when class distinction in society was not as palpable as during Thatcher’s regime, as the clones, like the working class, are on the bottom of the scale in society.

In brief, Huxley and Ishiguro have both created characters who are nostalgic about the past and who wish they could return to this period of time. As it turns out, though, both the Savage in *Brave New World* and the students of *Never Let Me Go* eventually become prey to society’s collective will to progress, much like the old society had to surrender to the advances made during both the inter-war era and during the late twentieth century.

Conclusion

As this essay has endeavoured to prove, *Brave New World* and *Never Let Me Go* are two good examples of Science Fiction portraying their own writers’ societies rather than speculative ones. By using the clone as a metaphor, Huxley and Ishiguro have managed to present societies permeated by class consciousness and an understanding that the individual is practically worthless on its own; where the sacrifice for the good of society is prioritised before self-interest; societies in which conditioning has been used on the clones in order to make them accept their inhumane, but inevitable destinies.

The use of the clone as a metaphor has functioned particularly well in these two works, as the clone on its own epitomizes much of how people were seen during the inter-war

⁵⁵Ibid, p. 267.

⁵⁶Toker and Chertoff.

⁵⁷For instance, Thatcher wanted to remoralize society by reintroducing Victorian values through, for example, secure marriages (Marr, p. 381).

era and in the late twentieth century. Not only does the clone signal a dispossession of individuality and function as a great means for describing a class society, but it also represents the fears of eugenics in Huxley's society and the fear of creating superhumans through genetic engineering in Ishiguro's society.

Although there are, indeed, some significant differences in the way Huxley and Ishiguro have decided to approach the issues around the clone and what it symbolizes, the results and the messages that are conveyed to the reader are largely the same. Huxley's approaches the representation of his society and the clone rather more concretely than Ishiguro does, with actual references to real-life people and detailed descriptions of how the cloning occurs. Ishiguro has a subtler way of presenting society and the clones, where the reader is invited to make a greater variety of interpretations of the work.

As this essay has proven, the societies that are presented in *Brave New World* and in *Never Let Me Go* can indeed be said to represent their own eras in terms of the outlook on mankind and society as a whole. Concurrently, it has also proven that the society of Huxley's novel, to a large extent, is similar to the society of Ishiguro's novel. Therefore, it can be concluded that the suggestion that the outlook on society and mankind actually has been through a very drastic change between the inter-war era and the late twentieth century England, is largely verified. Needless to say, in certain areas of society there have been a great advancement, but on a whole, the basic view of man and his role in society was the same when Huxley published his novel as it was when Ishiguro published his. This conclusion offers the somewhat disturbing insight that Huxley and Ishiguro has, by and large, depicted the same society, with a common view of mankind, even though more than seventy years has elapsed between the publication of *Brave New World* and the publication of *Never Let Me Go*.

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