

A Short Study on the Metaphorical Identity of Clones in *Never Let Me Go*: A Case Study of Chapter 5

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Abstract

Cloning has a huge ethical controversy in the real society. That is also the big concern of the novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005) by Japanese British writer Kazuo Ishiguro (1954—). On the surface of the novel, by showing the tragic fate of cloned human beings under the oppression of human society, it reflects the values of human beings thinking about whether to carry out cloning technology. Behind it, Ishiguro expresses his concerns about humanity through the consciousness and life of a cloned human, as well as the inner emotions of a normal human, including one's social and cultural identity. Taking chapter 5 as a case, this study discusses the metaphorical identity of clones. The study confirms that by describing the injustice suffered by clones Ishiguro portrays them as a special group that is difficult to survive in real life with a real human identity, and points out that such struggles and battles are too numerous to enumerate, and the more you can see the helplessness and sadness living at the bottom.

Keywords

Kazuo Ishiguro, identity, clone, *Never Let Me Go*.

1. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki in 1954. At the age of five, this would-be famous writer in English instead of Japanese moved to UK and received a British education. He was thus strongly influenced by British culture and traditions, however, his Japanese background has still created a gulf between him and mainstream British society. This kind of living between Japanese and Western culture has left Kazuo Ishiguro in a state of marginalized cultural identity. He cannot find his own cultural foothold from Japan, meanwhile it is difficult to find his own cultural identity in Britain. This unique immigrant experience has influenced Ishiguro's literary works, including *Never Let Me Go* (2005), which considers the meaning of life from the perspective of human cloning.

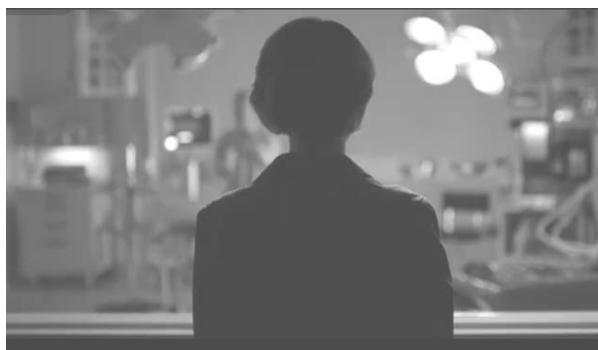


Figure 1 Casey (Screenshot from the 2010 film *Never Let Me Go*)

This novel is one of Ishiguro's most resonant works and has been nominated for the Man Booker Prize in the UK. It adopts the narrative mode of memory, with the protagonist Casey's memory as the perspective, slowly narrating the past years, giving readers a sense of being in the scene.

Through delicate and moving memory narration and special metaphor, he reveals the inner world of the characters and reveals the universal emotions and values of human beings. The novel centers on a group of clones kept in captivity at the closed Hailsham School and trained to care for them after their organs have been harvested, known as “caretakers”. But they all end up dying tragically from organ donation. In their hearts, the only thing worthy of happiness is “extended donation”, but with the gradual disclosure and destruction of lies and hopes, they can only come to an end in the endless despair in their hearts.

On the surface of the novel, by showing the tragic fate of cloned human beings under the oppression of human society, it reflects the values of human beings thinking about whether to carry out cloning technology. Behind it, Ishiguro expresses his problems and concerns about humanity through the consciousness and life of a cloned human, as well as the inner emotions of a normal human. All the protagonists in the novel appear to the reader to be clones, which seems to be science fiction on the surface.

However, many scholars have argued that *Never Let Me Go* is not about science, but rather a metaphor for humanity and social identity. Martin (2018, p. 9) understands the whole concept of “donation” as a metaphorical expression of human life. Through the description of the living environment of the clones in the novel, the author naturally shifts the reader’s attention from the clones to some special living groups in the real society. Wang Xiaozhang (1994, p. 25) believes that the clone in the work is a metaphor for the cultural orphan in the real world. They have neither traditional cultural sustenance nor new spiritual destination and sustenance. But in the same survival situation, different individuals have different attitudes and different individuals have different choices. But in the story, two people with identical genes lead very different lives. Xue Ming (2021, p. 16) reflects that the end of life of clones is the same as human beings to some extent, they all need to complete the life course, no matter what status you are, death is inevitable. It is perhaps through this metaphorical approach that Ishiguro reminds people that death should be accepted calmly, rather than using unethical means and technology to delay it.

Anyway, cloning has a huge ethical controversy in the real society. Metaphor is one of the core problems of western traditional theory. Profound literary works often contain metaphors. Literature, as an artistic means, is the creation of metaphor. This paper will further explore the metaphorical identity of clone in the real society.

2. The Metaphorical Identity of Clone in *Never Let Me Go*

In order to reproduce the scene described in the natural landscape in the novel and pave the way for his exploration of the deep metaphor of the article, the narrator starts with the layout of the site from the very starting point. He drives the scene from far to near from the perspective of the room, with weather changing from sunny to cloudy. The combination of these perspectives quickly places the reader in an eerie and intriguing situation near Hailsham. Take an excerpt as an example:

This was a task made much easier by the way the grounds were laid out. Hailsham stood in a smooth hollow with fields rising on all sides. That meant that from almost any of the classroom windows in the main house-and even from the pavilion-you had a good view of the long narrow road that came down across the fields and arrived at the main gate: The gate itself was still a fair distance off, and any vehicle would then have to take the gravelled drive, going past shrubs and flowerbeds, before at last reaching the courtyard in front of the main house. Days could sometimes go by without us seeing a vehicle coming down that narrow... The afternoon Madame’s car was spotted coming across the fields, it was windy and sunny, with a few storm clouds starting to gather. We were in Room 9-on the first floor at the front of the house-and

when the whisper went around, poor Mr. Frank, who was trying to teach us spelling, couldn't understand why we'd suddenly got so restless. (Ishiguro, 2010, p. 21)

In order to make the analysis more specific, this paper adopts a set of graphical labeling methods: significant verbs are underlined; Some key nouns are bold; Some important adjectives are shown in italics. Next, this article will explain these contents in detail.

Looking through the material, one can easily find some words related to the natural environment. Examples include "smooth hollow", "long narrow road", "fields", and "shrubs and flowerbeds". They are all concentrated in the first half of the paragraph. First of all, this means that Hailsham's geographical location is very remote, and few people show up, which indicates that perhaps it is not a normal school, but more like a prison. These words also laid a natural foundation for the arrival of small and medium-sized cars in the second paragraph, explaining why it caused the children's commotion. The second paragraph is filled with descriptions of weather phenomena, "The afternoon Madame's car was spotted coming across the fields, it was windy and sunny, with a few storm clouds starting to gather", Ishiguro uses a change in the weather to suggest to the reader that the story may be about to reach its first small climax. Perhaps suggesting that the adult Cathy gradually found the memory of the flawless growth process, began to appear untraceable confusion and terrible question marks, the truth gradually surfaced.



Figure 2 Hailsham (Screenshot from the 2010 film Never Let Me Go)

From reading the material, it is easy to find a word that appears a lot in this paragraph, namely "field". And the word echoes back and forth, giving the reader a sense of beginning and end echo. There are two repetitions in the first half of this paragraph and one in the second half, which continuously deepen the impression of the landscape around the clone school in the narrator's memory: "A smooth hollow with fields", "came down across the fields", "coming across the fields". This repetition suggests that the narrator is gradually wondering in his recollections and constantly revealing undiscovered details of the past. The adjectives used with "field" also provide further clues. First, the combination of "smooth" and "field" seems normal at first glance, but on closer reflection, the reader questions what should be an irregular scene, where "smooth" seems to suggest a force that has been manipulated artificially. Moreover, in the two instances in which the phrasal verb "come across" is used, the narrator seems to subconsciously convey the experience of a sense of escape from the place - a special moment, before a key event. It can be clearly seen that in the journey of recalling childhood life, the narrator reproduces the childhood time by recalling a large number of details. From far to near, from large to small, with both scenery and characters, almost all sentences in the excerpt are represented by bold nouns. Perhaps what puzzles the reader most is why the place is so remote and rundown that "a vehicle would then have to take the gravelled drive," And "Days could sometimes go by without us seeing a vehicle coming down that narrow." However, the situation changed a few days later, "The afternoon Madame's car was spotted coming across the fields", a moving car suddenly

appeared to break the original quiet atmosphere, and something strange in the school seemed to begin to reveal its clues. During the class, “we’d suddenly got so restless,” and Mr. Frank was equally puzzled as to why the students were so excited. The quiet outside is in sharp contrast to the bustle inside the classroom, and the author maintains a calm tone while creating a seemingly divided scene, giving the reader a very divisive scene transformation.

What is more noticeable to the reader is that in “it was windy and sunny, with a few storm clouds starting to gather”, “windy” and “sunny” are used in italics to indicate the transitional phase of weather, “storm clouds starting to gather” is used to indicate a dramatic change in the weather, as if to foretell something. Here the description of the changing weather, accompanied by the driving of the car and followed by the agitation of the children, is a fluctuation in the narrator’s memory, suggesting to the reader that the narrator himself recalls something, and that it is quite possible that the phenomenon is not as plain as it seems. In this paper, the changes of weather phenomena are used to render readers’ emotions and closely combine natural things with man-made events, which will help readers to accept and think about the hidden metaphorical content of the text.

From the perspective of literature, the application of metaphor will have a complex effect on the theme of the work, the characteristics of the characters and the content of the work. Therefore, in *Never Let Me Go*, the author takes a different perspective, and the clones with various survival difficulties are exactly the symbols of various roles in contemporary society, such as cross-regional migration, orphans and contemporary cloning technology products. To sum up, the study of metaphor in literary works is not only beneficial to enhance the value of literary works, but also provides a new research method for the sustainable development of metaphor theory. The theme behind the novel has modern meaning and multiple life meanings, which is worth our deep thinking.

Ishiguro states in a calm tone concerning the awakening and resistance from the bottom, like the ripples in the lake, which are only inconspicuous shivers, only insignificant clouds and winds, coming less warmly and leaving no one knows. This is a kind of self-seeking in a confusing reality, with a calm interpretation of daily life, which sets up a mirror that might show people that they do not have to pretend to pursue the freedom of the soul in a seemingly pure land. In this isolated place, all the inner haze can be revealed, layers peeled away, and only one person can see it—Kathy as an adult.

All those terrible traces of life that have been dismantled and reconstructed in Casey’s memory are overlaid once again. They are the voices of the unspeakable clones who have lost their lives, concerning the plight of them. Li Danling (2016, p. 201) believes that by describing the injustice suffered by clones, Ishiguro portrays them as a special group that is difficult to survive in real life. The upper society fulfills their selfish desires at the expense of the life and happiness of the bottom society. This phenomenon has not changed since its emergence at ancient times. In the long river of history, such struggles and battles have been too numerous to enumerate, and the more you can see the helplessness and sadness living at the bottom. However, if a person can locate clearly his or her belonging of self-identity, perhaps the situation will be not worsened. The rest for him or her would be merely to face the limited life, to recognize one’s own mission, to realize the value of self-life, to live up to the moment, meanwhile he would not be afraid of facing various sufferings and mistakes.

3. Conclusion

Ishiguro’s unique immigrant experience has influenced his literary works, including *Never Let Me Go* (2005), which considers the meaning of life from the perspective of human cloning. On the surface of the novel, by showing the tragic fate of cloned human beings under the oppression of human society, it reflects the values of human beings thinking about whether to

carry out cloning technology. Behind it, Ishiguro expresses his concerns about humanity through the consciousness and life of a cloned human, as well as the inner emotions of a normal human, including one's social and cultural identity. This study confirms that by describing the injustice suffered by clones Ishiguro portrays them as a special group that is difficult to survive in real life with a real human identity, and points out that such struggles and battles are too numerous to enumerate, and the more you can see the helplessness and sadness living at the bottom.

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