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“The Loss of Humanity”: Discarding humanity for a better life

INTRODUCTION

By using Thomson’s argument of ‘disability as a needed diversity worthy of coexisting with everyone else as’ well as Sing’s ‘transhumanistic versus posthumanistic perspective’, I will use Thomson’s concept of natural dysfunctionality and Sing’s transhumanistic perspective to argue that the humans within ‘Never Let Me Go’ have discarded a part of their humanity to reach a higher status and achieve transcendence and ultimately, leading to a better life.

CONCEPT 1

In ‘Eugenic World Building and Disability: The Strange World of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*’, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues that people with disabilities are to be viewed as natural variations, abilities, and limitations of the human body which should be understood as a proper way of living and existing in our world and not something that should be eliminated.

To further understand Thomson’s article, it is important to understand some of the terms she uses and makes during her writing. ‘Inclusive world building’ (Thomson 134) is something that Thomson find central in a world to co-exist with people who has certain limitations. The main belief in this inclusive world building is viewing disabilities as a needed and valued diversity in our society. Following the inclusive world building beliefs, the main point of the world building is to make a ‘barrier-free material environment’(Thomson 134) where people with disabilities are not limited by outside material obstacles such as having proper equipment and technologies, like an elevators.

As we have inclusive world building, we also have “eugenic world building” (Thomson 134-135), which is centered around the opposite belief of the inclusive world building. Eugenic world building is about eliminating human limitations for the betterment of human life quality as well as reducing the human suffering. The eugenic world building is exercised in many ways. Some of the main methods of eugenic world building is controlling reproduction, who can reproduce and what can be reproduced. In our modern society we can already see some of these methods being used actively. Some of these methods are selective abortion and genetic manipulation. A fetus is often valued by their genes, it is possible to view a fetus’s genes and tell if it has major disabilities. In many cases of a fetus having major disabilities the parent will get to choose if they want an abortion even if the fetus is older than the legal abortion life length, this is what Thomson calls “selective abortion” (Thomson 135). Alongside selective abortion Thomson also talks about gene manipulation where it is possible to change a fetus’s genes to modify certain aspects of the fetus, such as hair color.

Thomson also talk about the term of “normate” (Thomson 135-137), what is the normate? To be able to understand what a limitation is, or what a disability is, we must compare it to the normate. However, no humans are alike, so having a normate in such a world seems to be unrealistic. To further strengthen her statement Thomson talks about how there are allot of factors to consider when discussing a normate. Would a normate be different depending on age, gender, height, weight, health etc. A human body will at some point in its lifetime reach a peak in terms of health, muscle, and overall condition, this means that making such a normate for all humans would mean that most humans could fit in this normate, but only during certain periods of their lives as their health declines and while their body is still not developed (Thomson 136-137).

Talking about a normate is often considered to be a universal standard, which is often thought about when making certain designs or products. One of such is architectural design.

When making a house, an architect often focuses on making a modern, beautiful, or funky house instead of its functionality. Universal design is often made for the normate human which means some humans with minor or major limitations might find it difficult to operate said designs. Considering all of these factors when making a normate, should we still compare humans to a normate when we are all different? And as a result, proceed to make a category of disabled people just because of their limitations when compared to a certain normate?

Diving into the world of *Never Let Me Go*, Thomson states that a disability of any sort, be that of health issues or a physical limitation, is considered a disability (Thomson 137-141). This image of who is disabled also goes to show that the normate in Ishiguro's world is considered to be a healthy and fully functional human. Thomson is very fascinated by how Ishiguro has "reversed" the hierarchy in his world as disabled people typically are the ones who are viewed down upon, whereas in *Never Let Me Go* the able-bodied clones are of lower status and has to sacrifice their organs for the disabled humans (Thomson 138-139). As a result of the organ farming, a disability in this strange world will only ever be temporary, which results in the removal of the unwanted stigma of being disabled. Because of the temporary disabled status, any normal human in *Never Let Me Go* will naturally return their bodies to the state of normate.

A life worth living, and a life of quality in *Never Let Me Go* is dependent on your bodily status, your normate status. As mentioned, a disabled status will only be temporary, therefore there is no issue being disabled for a short while. All human citizens are allowed the same treatment and freedom regardless of their status because of the works of a "temporary" status. However, the clones in this society are brought up in a way that is believed to be the best way possible to maintain full functionality and health. This means that the clones are as normate as they can get, yet they are still at the bottom of the hierarchy and are segregated from the rest of the civilization and has to follow certain rules only containing to them, such

as not being allowed to smoke. On top of it all they are viewed as disgusting or repulsive by the normal citizens and even has to donate their organs and lose their normal health and functionality to those who are the ones with actual limitations.

To conclude, Thomson states that the world in *Never Let Me Go*, is a world where disability is seen as a limitation for human life and the individual's life quality. In order to eradicate this inconvenience, they started breeding clones to harvest their organs and ended up removing the stigma of being disabled, but in the same process unearthed the stigma of the clones. Thomson again talks about her argument where she believes disability should be viewed as a natural variation of the human body and not something to be eliminated as it is something that happens naturally. A status of normal is something all humans at some point, or many points in their lives will lose and possibly regain. Disability is not something that is limiting our society, but a needed diversity. Disabilities and limitations is not human inconvenience nor a choice and should therefore be embraced instead of discarded.

CONCEPT 2

While Thomson talks about the possible disabilities and how they decided to eliminate them through a eugenic world build when disabilities should, in reality, be embraced as a needed diversity in the world, integrated in society by an inclusive worldbuilding. Santi Ranjan Sing claims that *Never Let Me Go* is a case of transhumanism versus posthumanism.

In "We're modelled from trash": Confronting Transhumanism and Critical Posthumanism in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" Santi Ranjan Sing argues that Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is a case of transhumanism versus posthumanism. To add to his argument, he believes that the "real" humans/"possibles" in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* represents the transhumanistic belief while the clones represent the posthumanistic belief.

Sing starts off his article by exploring different terms and names which will be used throughout his article. To be able to understand Sing's article it is important to understand

who and what he refers to when talking about ‘Hailsham’, ‘possibles’, ‘guardians’ and ‘Madame’. Hailsham is a one-of-a-kind facility in the world of *Never Let Me Go*, made with the purpose of treating the clones in a more humane way in the hopes of proving their humanity. The possibles are the humans who are considered ‘real’ in the world of *Never Let Me Go*. The guardians are the teachers/babysitters keeping the order and tutoring the clones who are placed in Hailsham to be raised to donate their organs, and Madame is the head/principle of Hailsham.

Sing states that posthumanism denies any feature changes to humans that are not an innate human feature (Sing 150). Posthumanism is also mainly about de-centering humans in the sense that the world was not made for humans, but humans are simply living in this world alongside everyone and everything else. This means that posthumanists does not view themselves above anything else and values all life as equal, whereas a transhumanist seeks to change certain features or flaws to make life better and increase life quality in general for themselves (Sing 150). Transhumanists also view themselves to be atop of the hierarchy and views everyone else, aside from themselves, to be below them. After mentioning these major differences Sing states that all the possibles, or real humans inside of Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* are transhumanist who want to better their own lives and considers themselves to be better than other living organisms, such as animals, and clones in this instance (Sing 150).

The possibles are considered to be transhumanistic because of their mindset of wanting to transcend their limits, such as health or bodily issues, as well as viewing themselves better than others. Sing states that the possibles actions and solutions to this transcendence ultimately dehumanizes the clones and removes their identity as well as their human uniqueness (Sing 152-153). Sing also states that the clones are ‘presented not more than animals and objects (...)’ (Sing 150).

Sing continues to argue that the posthumanistic belief is represented by the clones (Sing 153-154). As mentioned, a posthumanist decenters humans from the world while also viewing themselves as equal to other lifeforms and nature. Sing claims that the clones never believe the world revolves around them (Sing 154), which is made clear by the way clones are made and nurtured to be used and sacrificed for the possibles. As the clones are aware of their reality and futures, they know that they are not the center nor important in this world. He also argues that even though the possibles treat the clones like trash and animals to be discarded or sacrificed for their own transcendence and status, the clones always treat them with respect and sincerity like they would treat other clones (Sing 152). Although the clones' treatment of the possibles could stem from their feeling of being inferior, Sing believes that their respect towards their abusers are proof of their posthumanism.

After discussing the different terms, Sing argues that the clones are indeed human (Sing 150-151). He uses a few examples and quotations to humanize them, especially referring to their emotions such as fear, love and friendship. He also mentions how Hailsham is a school to nurture these clones in a more humane way where their guardians are attempting to prove to society that the clones are humans, just like them. One of the methods Hailsham uses to prove the clone's humanity is by showing of their art to the outside world. It is important to note that these guardians and Madame is among the minority of humans who believes in the better treatment towards the clones, and hence started the Hailsham project.

Because the art is such an important factor for Hailsham and Madame in order to prove the clone's humanity (the clones is not aware of what the art is for) the art naturally becomes of importance to them as well, Sing refers to a quotation made by Kathy where she explains how popularity and respect in Hailsham would often stem from how good their art and creativity was. This is also one of Sing's ways to show how the clones are establishing factors like popularity, respect, friends etc. just as ordinary humans do (Sing 152-153).

One of the aspects that makes humans human, are feelings and emotions. Sing refers to the situation where Kathy and a few other students come to realize the disgust and fear the Madame has for them (Sing 151). Their realization is something the clones themselves knew they would face or witness someday, yet many of them started crying and they were all upset. These emotions prove how these clones are human.

Sing goes on to talk about the morale and equality within the book. He states that the society within *Never Let Me Go* causes a situation of superior-inferior (Sing 152). As the students are aware of the fact that they are brought up to donate their organs for their possibles, they automatically get the sense of being inferior. Because they believe themselves to be inferior, whereas the possibles being superior, they go about their life not fighting back or standing up for themselves as they truly believe they are inferior and that this is how their lives will be and end. Even if they wanted to stand up for themselves, they know they are inferior and wouldn't be able to achieve any of the wanted results.

In a democratic transhumanistic society, such as the one described in *Never Let Me Go*, the citizens believe in equal right and opportunities. In this case the equal rights and opportunities would mean equal access of technological enhancement for all. However, this core belief is only available to the possibles. And the clones are not included in any way which prove how the possibles does not view them as their equals, it also shows how the clones are used only for the possibles own betterment.

Moving on, Sing argues that the possibles actively views the clones as something less than humans and dehumanizes them thereafter (Sing 152-153). Some of the best examples of the clones dehumanization is Madame and mainly her reactions, actions and use of words towards the clones. Madame's actions around the clones are often referred to as the way someone would react if they saw a spider. She would have some sort of fear and disgust on her face, and she would often, if not by much, back away from them if they got too close. Madame's

view of the clones is also reinforced when she refers to the clones as ‘‘poor creatures’’ (Ishiguro 249). These factors make the clones seem like animals, almost as if they are animalized. It is again important to remember that Madame is one of the few people who believes clones should be treated better and tried to prove how they are human, yet she still acts and behave like she detests them.

During a meeting between Kathy, Tommy, Emily, and Madame who turns out to be named Marie-Claude, Kathy and Tommy realizes that a clones worth, at least in the view of the possibles, lies in their numbers. This number refers to how many organs they donate before they ‘‘complete’’ and die. This realization reduces their identities and worth to mere numbers and how many donations they are able to survive.

As a sort of conclusion, Sing talk about his main pointers and sums them up. He mentions that the transhumanism is presented through the ‘‘possibles’’ because of their way of acting above everyone else, and their choice of institutionalizing organ farming and harvesting, while the posthumanism is shown through the clones by their decentered reality and behavior. He also talks about how the clones are reduced to animals, having no uniqueness and being the same as all the other life forms on earth, whereas the ‘‘possibles’’ are seeking a better life through this bodily enhancement to increase their own human features.

COMPARE/CONTRAST

While reading both Thomson’s and Sing’s articles, there are some important differences and some important similarities. The first difference is their view of the humans. In Thomson’s article, she claims that the humans are either normate or disabled. The normate humans are healthy and fully functional just like all the other normate humans, while some of them are considered to be disabled as compared to the normate human body and is therefore in need of a transplant from the clones. However, in Sing’s article, the humans are viewed as humans of

transhumanistic beliefs. This means that they believe themselves to be better and above other animals and races. On one side, they are either disabled or completely normal, while on the other, they are transhumanistic humans who believe themselves to be at the top of the hierarchy and act thereafter.

Secondly, their view of the clones is different. Sing claims that the clones are as human as the rest of the humans. He also claims that they believe themselves to be human at times when they are not reminded of the human's discrimination and dehumanizing. However, Thomson has a different view. She never states that the clones are humans because they are scientific clones, but she still believes there are traces of humanity in them. The main difference in their views is how Thomson states that the clones are raised in the best possible way to achieve a normal status. Because of their upbringing she believes that the clones are the best examples of normal and has the best bodily conditions even when compared to the normal humans. Therefore, she believes that the clones are at least as good as the human and that it does not make sense for the normal clones to sacrifice their normal status by donating their organs to the humans with what she calls a disabled status. Sing on the other hand only claims that the clones are humans who are oppressed and discriminated against which results in their loss of uniqueness and identity.

Lastly, Sing and Thomson both have the same perception of the way the humans portray themselves and how the humans portray the clones. They both perceive how the humans believe themselves to be at the top of the hierarchy and does not view other races or animals as significant compared to themselves. They both also perceive how the humans view the clones as nothing more than what they think of animals or livestock. Like they raise cows and pigs to appease their hunger, they raise clones to eliminate their bodily limitations and disabilities.

CLOSE READING

By understanding both Thomson's concept of natural dysfunctionality as well as Sing's argument of transhumanism versus posthumanism, I argue that the humans in *Never Let Me Go* have chosen to discard a part of their humanity to reach a higher status and transcendence.

In order to show how someone has discarded their humanity we must first know what makes us human in the first place. In Sing's article he clearly states that what makes us human are emotions, feelings, and our sense of morality (Sing 150). Another aspect that makes us human according to Thomson is our natural growth and deterioration (Thomson 141). By reading *Never Let Me Go*, it is clear that both of these key human features are in some way or form broken or removed by the possibles.

Throughout the book of *Never Let Me Go* the humans always believe themselves to be atop of the world and that every other living organism is beneath them. They are disgusted by the clones and repulsed by them and fear them even though they were made in their own picture and have human feelings and human emotions. The humans discriminate and segregate the clones and even force them to grow up in harsh conditions, only to harvest their organs for their own betterment. They even make the clones take care of each other both during and after their donations as to not live around the clones themselves. Through this entire affair, the humans are only shown to have feelings of disgust and fear directed at the clones. Although fear and disgust are human feelings, the feelings and emotions that would have been most human at these situations would be guilt, sadness, or remorse. The possibles are aware that these clones have feelings and are capable of understanding and processing their reality, yet the possibles do not show any kind of remorse or guilt for producing these clones only to make them suffer for their own personal gain.

All feelings and emotions could be called human emotions, but what makes these emotions truly human is our sense of morality and ethics. If we cause each other harm or even small discomfort, we usually feel guilty about this fact and apologize because we would not

want someone to inflict the same discomfort or harm against us. However, in the world of *Never Let Me Go*, the possibles inflict harm, discomfort, and even death upon the clones which proves their loss of humanity because they would go as far as manufacturing living clones to harvest their organs without even feeling remorse or guilt. They even go as far as to feel disgust towards them because they are not real humans and therefore beneath them.

Hailsham was originally made as a project to better the clones treatment, therefore, one would believe that the humans in charge would feel some sort of sympathy towards them. However, they turn out to be disgusted and repulsed by them. Only Lucy, one of their guardians felt the smallest sense of guilt towards the clones, this was shown through her actions of telling them about their futures as not to make the children dream of big futures such as becoming a rockstar. At the end of the book, we are also shown a scene where Emily, a former guardian at Hailsham, and Madame are married, however, there is no sign of any love or affection other than living together. It also seems like a relationship between a caretaker and caregiver as Emily is currently in a wheelchair and is seen to by Madame. This also indicated that Emily will most likely get a transplant to get back to normal status in the near future.

Because of the possibles' lack of sympathy and morality I argue that they have discarded a part of their humanity in the process of enhancing their own life quality and to remove disabilities and liabilities.

The possibles clearly depicts a transhumanistic belief through their actions. They believe themselves to be atop of, and at the center of the world while also doing anything within their power to better their own lives and life quality. Eventually, this belief turned into a eugenic world building where they make new rules, and new facilities, all the while ignoring any sort of morality in order to better themselves. Ultimately their new approach of improving their lives, organ harvesting, eliminated disabilities and gave the word a new meaning where

all types of bodily limitations became a disability, while at the same time only being temporary.

To strengthen my argument further, a key feature of humans is their natural growth as well as their natural deterioration. As we grow older, we will gain more muscle, height, and develop a more advanced and adapted brain as well as eyesight and coordination. Then, after reaching a certain peak and age, we start to deteriorate. We start to lose muscle, our immune system grows weaker, our brains can get cloudy and our bodies overall, both inside and outside becomes weaker. However, in *Never Let Me Go*, the possibles have decided to view this natural deterioration of the human body as a negative side of life and as a disability, therefore they chose to eliminate it. Because of this transhumanistic view of life, the possibles discard this key feature of human life in the search for a more comfortable life.

While the humans seem to have discarded some of their humanity, the clones are shown to have all sort of human emotions and human morality. They build up friendships and bond together, they feel love, they feel sadness, they get scared, and they care for others. Kathy shows us how she feels a sense of belonging to her home, Hailsham and all of the Hailsham students by trying to be a caregiver for all the caretakers who went to Hailsham. We are also shown how love and friendship is made through Kathy and Tommy. We can see how the clones feel sadness when Ruth dies, or when they realize how they are viewed by the humans. They fight with each other and have conflicts. The clones are also shown to feel the fear of death and loneliness through the act of trying to get a deferral form Madame when Tommy is closing in on his 3rd donation. At this point it would be safe to say that the clones resemble humanity more than the actual humans in this bizarre world, yet the possibles still treat them as mere animals and insects even though they clearly depict a true human.

In one of the last scenes of *Never Let Me Go*, we can see Kathy, Tommy, Emily, and Madame talking. During their conversation we are shown allot of interesting facts regarding

both how humans in general view clones and also how Madame and Emily views the clones. Kathy and Tommy approaches Madame in order to get a rumored 'deferral' which would postpone their donations if they could show Madame they were truly in love. This deferral turns out to be nothing more than a rumor, however, their conversation, as mentioned, is quite interesting. While Kathy and Tommy chats with Madame, Madame keeps asking "'Do I go too far?'" (Ishiguro 246-250) multiple times throughout the entire discussion, this phrase is usually expressed after talking about the clones' souls or their humanlike features. Then, after listening to Kathy and Tommy mention the deferral and tell her how they are truly in love she asks them in a shocked manner, as if she does not believe them "'You say you're sure? Sure that you're in love? How can you know? You think love is that simple?'" (Ishiguro 247) Every time Madame talked about how the clones could have souls or humanlike features she asks herself if she is going too far by comparing them to real humans, then, when the clones themselves express their belief of being in love, an emotion Madame believes a clone would never be able to replicate, she becomes shocked and enters a state of disbelief. Madame's reactions and words tells us how she does not view the clones as anything close to human, nor able to replicate any of the humanlike features.

After they chat for a while, Tommy and Kathy explains their reasoning for visiting and why they believe Madame collected all of their best artworks at Hailsham, at this point Madame replies by saying "'You poor creatures.'" (Ishiguro 249). By naming the clones 'creatures', Madame not only dehumanizes them and compares them to insects and animals, but she also removes their identity and uniqueness by referring to them as creatures and not as the individuals they have grown to become.

Madame decides she has talked to Kathy and Tommy for long enough and steps aside, allowing Emily to make her appearance. Emily enters the living room in her wheelchair. During Emily's discussion with Tommy and Kathy, she reveals how the humans only value

clones by their number, which relates to how many donations they are able to survive before they die and ‘completes’. Upon the end of their conversation, Emily tells the clones, ‘‘And the memories, I suppose, of all of you. And the knowledge we’ve given you better lives than you would have had otherwise.’’ (Ishiguro 260). First, Emily degrades the clones from creatures and animals to only a number. Then proceeds to tell the clones of how Hailsham was a paradise compared to how other clones were nurtured and that they should be thankful that they got to grow up like they did and to get to know each other.

Through these examples, it is clear how Madame and Emily views themselves above the clones and refuses to believe that the likes of these simple creatures would be able to feel the same sort of emotions as the humans do and stopping themselves from going too far by simply discussing that the clones could possibly have some humanlike features. This shows their transhumanistic traits of being above all others races and animals. Then, when Emily enters the room in a wheelchair, showing off her ‘disabled status’, she still truly believes she is of higher status than these clones, even going as far as to tell the clones how they should be grateful for the ‘better’ lives they got because of them and because of Hailsham. Combining all of these remarks and statements from Madame and Emily, it is also clear how they do not feel any remorse or guilt for the clones. Some of their sentences might seem like they could be sympathetic, however, they are overshadowed by the disgust, dehumanization and discrimination hidden in their actions and remarks.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I believe that the humans in *Never Let Me Go* has discarded a part of their humanity in order to reach a higher transcendence and life quality because of their choice of making human clones only to mistreat them and discriminate them. This ultimately leads to sacrifice them after harvesting all of their organs. In the process of farming and harvesting human organs they disregard all morals related to their actions which leads to disregarding

one of their key human traits. They also remove the human trait of natural deterioration by removing all of their bodily limitations and disabilities. By discarding and disregarding both the key human feature of morals as well as the removal of all natural limitations and the natural way of growing old, I claim that they have discarded a part of their humanity only to be able to live a little longer and a little more comfortably.

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