Exploring Unease

A Study of How Unease is Produced in Kazuo Ishiguro’s

*Never Let Me Go*

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Abstract
This paper deals with the novel *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro and explores the feeling of unease established by the author. The theoretical framework for this paper is based on questions of humanity and thus makes use of existentialism as established by Sartre and Kierkegaard. Initially the essay explores how the setting of the novel helps establish a familiar world with unfamiliar elements. After that questions of humanity are raised and how these questions relate to the clones by showing that the clones have human qualities yet are not treated as human. These questions are expanded in the following part about ethical issues and it is shown that the reader is tempted by the author to cross certain ethical boundaries leading to a feeling of unease. Special attention is given to freedom of choice in the third part of the analysis and it is shown how the choices of the clones are very limited, especially if they are considered human. The fourth part then discusses the narrative perspective and how the narrator Kathy H. is used by the author to establish a connection and a perception of the narrator as human.
**Introduction**

Reading a book or novel can have different effects on the reader. The books, however, which really have an impact are the ones that make a person question, think and wonder. To achieve this effect an author can make use of several different approaches, touching upon multitudes of subjects and make use of the almost endless possibilities and freedoms available. One genre of books which, due to their confronting nature, often has a big impact on the reader is the dystopian novel.

An author considered skilled in creating an uneasy feeling through mysterious, confronting, and intriguing novels is the Japanese born and British raised author Kazuo Ishiguro. For the purpose of this paper the focus will lie on one of Ishiguro’s dystopian novels: *Never Let Me Go* of 2005. According to the Merriam Webster online dictionary a Dystopia is “an imaginary place where people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives”, a statement which fits the book very well. However, the aim of this essay is not to establish whether *Never Let Me Go* is a dystopian novel but instead to answer the question of how the author Kazuo Ishiguro establishes the feeling of unease.

To explore the question about how the unease is achieved this essay will mainly focus on different motives present in the novel *Never Let Me Go* but the essay will also touch upon narration and foreshadowing. These motives will involve, among others, scientific advancement, questions of the boundaries of humanity, the effects of organ donation, ethical issues especially in relation to non-human beings, and the problem of choice and freedom of choice. Moreover, due to the subtlety with which some of these motives are represented in the novel a comparison will be made with three other novels in an attempt to foreground these issues.
The three other novels are: *Brave New World* written 1931 by Aldous Huxley, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* written 1896 by H.G. Wells and *A Clockwork Orange* written 1962 by Anthony Burgess. The choice of these books depends on several factors of which the first and foremost are that they are well known, easy to understand, canonized dystopian novels. By choosing canonized literature within roughly the same field a comparison should be made easier to understand. Each book in itself also enables comparison of different aspects of the primary text *Never Let Me Go*. For *Brave New World* the relevance lies mainly in the discussion of scientific advancement, of choice and freedom of choice and the search for identity and to a lesser degree with the discussion of humanity. Secondly *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is a novel whose main purpose was to discuss what it means to be human, and thus is highly relevant for that specific topic. The novel also deals with scientific advancements and many ethical issues connected to this. Third, *A Clockwork Orange* discusses choice and freedom of choice in relation to humanity, and it is also very useful when it comes to comparisons involving the narrative perspective of *Never Let Me Go*.

It should be noted that the 4 novels discussed in this paper differ quite significantly in age. This should, however, not pose much of a problem as dystopian novels in general are used to encourage people to reflect on contemporary issues in society along with the uneasy feeling that might accompany such reflections. These issues of course change and evolve over time and will thus differ between the novels. However, due to the general nature of the concerns this does not get in the way of comparison since for example scientific advancement can be an issue raised in any time period even if the level of advancement might differ.
Theoretical Framework: Humanity, Unease and Choice

To discuss the different motives and the feeling of unease it is important to first define what ‘the unease’ is and how it is established. The most relevant work on this subject is written by Sigmund Freud and called the unheimlich or the uncanny. Freud establishes in his article The “Uncanny” that the unheimlich, as the opposite to the heimlich, can be defined in two different ways. Firstly the unheimlich can be seen as the opposite of that which is familiar, homelike, and intimate and, secondly, as the opposite of that which is secret. With the former meaning the uncanny or the unease refers to the strange, eerie and unfamiliar while in the latter case it refers to that which should remain secret or stay hidden (2).

In his article Freud also strongly links the uncanny to animate beings which are perhaps not really alive, or, alternatively, to lifeless objects which might be animate. Freud expands on this theory by citing Jentsch who stated that in “telling a story, one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton” (5). This means that questions regarding humanity and what can be considered human are relevant for the creation of the uneasy or uncanny feeling and thus makes Freud’s theoretical work relevant for the discussion about the uneasy feeling created in the book Never Let Me Go.

As mentioned earlier this essay will deal with questions about the boundaries between human and non-human. One theoretical framework which deals with such questions can be found within existentialism. Due to the fact that, according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Søren Kirkegaard is widely regarded as the precursor of the existential movement it will be important to use his work to create a deeper understanding of that which makes a person human and perhaps more importantly that which does not. The essay “Existence, emotion, and virtue: Classical Themes in Kierkegaard” by Robert C. Roberts, demonstrates
that Kierkegaard focuses on humanity through the taking of action but from the perspective of emotions and concerns. This means that actions can be taken based on strong emotions. Kierkegaard also strongly foregrounds the moments after actions where a human being will be reflecting backwards and deciding whether an action has been the appropriate one (177).

The philosopher who has later on adapted existentialism into a more modern theory and who is most relevant for this work is Jean-Paul Sartre who has not only dealt with the boundaries of humanity (what it is to be human or not human) but also brings ethics into the equation. Sartre, for example, discusses living in a world of ‘oppression and exploitation’ and can thus be linked to the world of the characters in Never Let Me Go. Sartre, just like Kierkegaard, defines human beings by their actions as well as by having the freedom to take these actions. The main difference from Kierkegaard is that, according to Sartre, action is not defined by emotion but rather by a conscious decision. Moreover, each chosen decision is not only a reflection of the individual as a person but also of the image of humanity that this person deems humanity should aim for (32).

Sartre touches upon the subject of humanity in combination with existentialism in his lecture “Existentialism & Humanism” delivered in Paris in 1945. In an attempt to define existentialism Sartre states that the first principle of existentialism is that “man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself” (30). This means that a human not only has the ability to change the course of his or her life but also that there is no predestined purpose to existence. This, however, also means that “it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders” (31). Sartre further notes that what a human makes of his or her life is not only an individual choice, but that in choosing for himself every man also chooses for all other men because one chooses “an image of man such as he believes he ought to be” (32) and thus makes “a commitment on behalf of all mankind” (32). This indicates that for Sartre humanity is closely related to
ambition, will and choice but that the image of what a human should be is also defined by each of the choices a person makes for him or herself. Furthermore, Sartre also does not accept that a human’s choices may be based on passion or circumstance, but instead states that a person indicates will through action and that actions are thus direct choices and cannot be excused by circumstance. In addition, Sartre clearly defines the individual in relation to others around him. After supporting the moment of human discovery of the self through ‘I think, therefore I am’ Sartre expands this by stating that the “discovery of myself is at the same time the revelation of the other as a freedom which confronts mine, and which cannot think or will without doing so either for or against me” (52). This shows that choices and actions are made in relation to others and that, simultaneously, their choices and actions are in relation to oneself.

Kierkegaard, as the precursor of existentialism and thus of Sartre’s thinking, focuses a lot less on freedom and choice but instead deals with emotions and virtuous actions. However, Kierkegaard strongly links good and bad emotions or good and bad actions to choice as shown by Robert C. Roberts in his essay on classical themes in Kierkegaard (179). This means that in choosing to do the right thing or in experiencing the right emotion humanity is shown according to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard indicates that emotions are based on concerns such as interests, passions, and enthusiasms (Roberts 184). Comparing Sartre and Kierkegaard, then, shows that, according to Sartre, emotions cannot dictate actions since for example passion cannot be used as an excuse for making a certain choice while Kierkegaard states that emotions are based on thought which means that emotions can to a certain extent be controlled by thinking about a situation in a certain way (184). Based on the above one could define a human being as a self-aware being able to make conscious choices for him- or herself, yet in relation to and with an awareness of others and with a certain level of emotion. This is the definition which guides the analysis in this essay.
Lastly humanity will be defined based on a less philosophical and more generally accepted approach through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights drafted by the United Nations. This declaration discusses the rights of all members of the human family and should function as a “foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”. By looking at the 30 different articles discussing the rights each human being should have, a clear picture is painted of what a human being should have access to. By looking at these rights and comparing them to the rights given to beings in the novel, certain conclusions can be drawn about their humanity.
Analysis

The book *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro will be analyzed on the following topics: Scientific Advancement, The Boundaries of Humanity, Ethical Issues, Choice, Narrative Perspective, and Foreshadowing and Mystery. Analyzing these topics should explore how the author establishes a feeling of unease in the novel.

**Scientific Advancement**

To engage in an in-depth analysis of Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go* it is important to have a clear picture of the setting of the book. The reader is presented with a world rather similar to contemporary England in which Kathy H. tells the story of her coming of age. From the perspective of being thirty-one years of age Kathy paints a picture of her childhood and teens which in many aspects should be very recognizable for a person who grew up in England during the nineteen eighties and nineties. However, the world created in the novel has one significant element which makes it differ strongly from modern western society; cloning technology has advanced far further and resulted in the production of clones for the purpose of organ harvesting. This specific scientific advancement plays a key role in the book as the reader is confronted with the upbringing of a number of these clones and eventually the dark fate that awaits them. It is important to note that in other areas scientific discoveries advance at an equal pace to current modern society and are thus still very recognizable for the reader. This can be exemplified by Kathy’s experiences with a music tape about which she states: “I suppose it was originally an LP – the recording date’s 1956 – but what I had was the cassette” (66-67). She also explains that she couldn’t always listen to it because she bought the tape “a few years before Walkmans started appearing at the Sales” (67).

The above shows that on the one hand there is the familiar development of the scientific world from LP to cassette and walkmans which will later develop into cd players, and on the
other hand there is the scientific capability to produce clones. As demonstrated in the theoretical framework, Freud shows that the word familiar can be equated with the ‘heimlich’ (3). Thus the other unfamiliar part is the opposite, the ‘unheimlich’. This close link between unfamiliarity and that which makes a person feel uneasy shows the importance of exploring which parts of the novel can be considered familiar and which cannot. By this token, having both the unheimlich and the heimlich closely interwoven, results in the author using the unfamiliar ability to create clones to introduce an uncanny element into a familiar and recognizable world.

To create some perspective on this exploration of the familiar and unfamiliar a comparison can be made with Huxley’s *Brave New World* in which the reader encounters a barely recognizable world (with, for example, flying cars) when compared to modern western society. There, the scientific advancements have brought about so many changes that the reader is confronted with more unfamiliar elements than familiar ones. In the world depicted by Huxley the reader also finds the element of cloning which is used in combination with genetic manipulation to control both class society and world population. The above example shows that where Huxley gives the reader a world which is clearly unfamiliar and may instantly create an uneasy feeling, Ishiguro applies a more subtle approach with a very familiar world with one small unfamiliar element building up to a general unease.

From a more general point of view it can be said that scientific advancement can be used as a motive by authors to confront the reader with uncanny, and thus uneasy, subjects. The fictive world allows authors the freedom to not only create a universe in which particular scientific advancements are made but also to speculate on what might happen if these advancements were moved from the theoretical to the practical level by showing how they may function in the world and with which consequences. This can be seen in *Never Let Me Go* with the clones, in *Brave New World* with flying cars, clones and genetic manipulation, in
The Island of Doctor Moreau with vivisecting animals to change them into humans and lastly in A Clockwork Orange where behavior is manipulated through scientifically created brainwashing techniques. All these worlds echo what Freud noted; “there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life” (18). This also means that these books do not only show what is possible through scientific advancement but at the same time question to what extent these advancements achieve a result that is wanted, and by whom.

The Boundaries of Humanity

In the slightly different world of Never Let Me Go the reader meets Kathy H and her friends as they grow up at a school called Hailsham. Through different clues which are gradually presented throughout the book it is made clear that these characters are in fact clones created with the intention of having their organs harvested. However, because the story is told in the voice of a clone the reader is invited to grow fond of Kathy and her friends early on. By participating in their lives and by being exposed to Kathy’s victories, doubts, worries, internal conflicts and other emotions the reader will most likely experience Kathy as human. In doing so the discovery that she will be exploited so completely for her organs becomes all the more horrifying and will almost certainly leave the reader with an uneasy feeling. This means that the question which comes to mind is what defines a person as human being, a question that is even brought forward in the book itself.

To define what makes a being human and to explore whether the clones can have any claim to humanity this essay turns towards both Sartre and Kierkegaard mentioned in the theoretical background. A clear definition of the boundaries of humanity is needed to allow for a later discussion of ethical issues and how they contribute to a feeling of unease.
Moreover, Freud, by his use of Jentsch, closely links the uneasy or the uncanny to “doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive” (5).

When comparing the definition of humanity from the theoretical framework, (a self-aware being able to make conscious choices for him- or herself, yet in relation to and with an awareness of others and with a certain level of emotion) to *Never Let Me Go* there is Kathy H, a being who talks about herself and her life as well as her relationships to her friends. This indicates a self-awareness and an awareness of others. She also shows that she questions the things she experiences: “Where before I’d have backed away from awkward stuff, I began instead, more and more, to ask questions, if not out loud, at least within myself” (Ishiguro 76). This statement indicates several things; an awareness of the self by referring to ‘myself’, an awareness of the surroundings and the ability to question those surroundings, and lastly a conscious choice to ask those questions rather than backing away from them. All of the above indicates human behavior according to existentialist thinking and, furthermore, it shows the concerns that Kierkegaard mentions as the base of emotions.

Kathy H. is also clearly aware of how her own self is reflected in relation to others. “Didn’t we all dream from time to time about one guardian or other bending the rules and doing something special for us? A spontaneous hug, a secret letter, a gift?” (60). With this statement Kathy H. shows that the actions of others impact her life. Moreover, by yearning for a special hug, letter or gift she is longing for a special acknowledgement of herself as a special individual different from the students around her. This means that Kathy is looking for an emotional connection to the Guardians to distinguish a unique self.

Sartre states that choices made by one individual have consequences for all mankind. A very clear-cut example can be found in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* where the animals
vivisected into human beings live in a community under what they call ‘the law’. This law is supposed to make the beast-humans act human.

Not to go on all-Fours; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to suck up Drink; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to eat Flesh or Fish; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to claw Bark or Trees; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to chase other Men; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?

(Wells 59)

The law shown above is used by H.G. Wells mainly to indicate what, according to the author, separates humans from beasts. However, that which brings this Law back to Sartre is that the *choice* to break this law by eating meat, as happens in the novel, reflects on the men-beasts and makes them revert back to their animalistic behavior and away from their humanity. So by one man-beast choosing what he feels he should be like, an example is set for the others. Although most of the choices made by Kathy have no consequences of equal impact as the example from *The Island of Doctor Moreau* they still show that she reflects on how a human should behave. An example can be found in her doubts about whether to passively watch as Tommy is teased over and over again by the other children in the book. She wonders if it is acceptable for the others to treat him that way and by choosing to stay passive she admits that it is. As soon as she becomes more active in the matter she also manages to bring about a change and partially help Tommy change his behavior.

In *Brave New World* the readers are confronted with human beings indoctrinated to hold certain opinions through a method of sleep-hypnosis. This, alongside with genetic manipulation, creates humans who should be well suited for their role in society and also extremely happy with their position. Significantly, one of the phrases repeated regularly in the novel is “everybody’s happy” (79). It is interesting, though, that the characters which feel most human in the book are the ones who have had small accidents in their genetic manipulation and are therefore considered flawed. The lack of ambition, emotion and
personal opinion of the ‘perfect’ humans in the novel in fact make them appear inhuman compared to the flawed characters. One can conclude from this that being human also involves choosing or doing the wrong thing at times. As Kierkegaard states, a combination of passion and reflection is needed to make decisions (182). This means that even if the wrong decisions are made behavior can change through passionate reflection upon the actions made. Connecting this to *Never Let Me Go* shows us a well-rounded character in the form of Kathy H making good and bad decisions and reflecting upon them: “I now felt awful, and I was confused. But as we stood there together staring at fog and rain, I could think of no way now to repair the damage I’d done” (60). It can in fact be said that she is constantly reflecting on her actions of the past while reminiscing throughout the majority of the book and providing insights she only acquired at a later age: “But when I think about it now I can see things more from Ruth’s viewpoint” (127).

The question of humanity is also raised in the book itself. The ability to be creative through different art-forms such as poetry, paintings, clay modeling etcetera is highlighted as extremely important for the students during their years in Hailsham. Art is not only appreciated and traded between the students but some is also taken away to the almost mythical gallery by a woman referred to as ‘madame’. Rumours float around that in this gallery and through art it is possible to see whether the students are able to love and can truly be in love with each other. Proving such love between two people could then lead to a deferral which means that the organ donations would be postponed. These rumours, however, prove to be untrue yet it is revealed that the art was actually used by a small movement to prove that the clones had souls and to improve their situation. Miss Emily, one of the well-respected guardians at Hailsham, talks about this movement at the end of the novel and mentions that the donations formed a “barrier against seeing you [the clones] as properly human” (258). This can be considered a vicious cycle because while the donations stop the clones from being
seen as properly human, their supposed lack of humanity allows for the donations to take place, thus perpetuating the system. Miss Emily also explains that the movement eventually folds due to lack of support and a great uproar about something called the Morningdale scandal which involved a researcher trying to use cloning techniques to enhance human capabilities. This raised the already existing fear of the clones and stifled all attempts to discuss a better life for the clones. Miss Emily, despite being well respected, expresses her fear of the clones quite clearly near the end of the novel; “Is she [madame] afraid of you? We’re all afraid of you. I myself had to fight back my dread of you all almost every day I was at Hailsham” (264). In this context, it is interesting to note that the link between creativity and humanity is up to a certain point acknowledged by Sartre. He mentions that man creating himself is an act of being “creative […] of an image of man such as he ought to be” (32)

To conclude the discussion about humanity and the unease, it can be said that by presenting the characters in the book as human and making them qualify for many, if not all, of the criteria which make a being considered human, the author creates a suspicion that something is wrong throughout the novel, thus creating a feeling of unease. Freud cites Jentsch about this exact subject:

In telling a story, one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton; and to do it in such a way that his attention is not directly focused upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be urged to go into the matter and clear it up immediately

(Freud 5)

The quotation shows that by dealing with clones, potential automatons, and yet making these clones appear as fully human and having a claim on humanity this exact doubt is exercised and results in feelings of unease. In other words, by making the reader wonder throughout the novel what exactly is wrong or special about the main character and her friends, the reader is never allowed to drop his or her guard and is kept in an uneasy tension.
Ethical Issues

In his essay on the uncanny Freud focuses mainly on the secret lifelessness of an animate being or, conversely the secret life of an inanimate one. However, based on his definition of the uncanny (*unheimlich*) as unfamiliar it can also be said that the reader may experience a feeling of unease by suddenly ending up in unfamiliar territory. In the case of *Never Let Me Go* and other dystopian novels readers are often tempted to leave their comfort zone and may find themselves confronted with ethical issues perhaps not considered earlier. Moreover, these ethical issues are a gray area due to the fact that they include fictive elements such as the clones in *Never Let Me Go* and can thus complicate the reader’s ability to make a clear cut decision on such issues. By suddenly introducing complicated ethical dilemmas about characters which readers might find themselves attached to, it is possible for the author to tempt the reader into crossing certain ethical boundaries before the reader has even realized it. If the reader suddenly realizes that such a boundary has been crossed this can certainly lead to an uneasy feeling.

In *Never Let Me Go* the main ethical issue raised is whether it is acceptable in a society to breed and raise clones for the purpose of organ harvesting. This issue is raised in combination with questions about what kind of upbringing these clones should have, exemplified through the mentioning of facilities other than Hailsham where the clones are rumoured to have lived under far worse conditions. However, it is important to note that Kathy, while grappling with different issues, is never really in conflict with the world around her, and even, by working as a carer, in a way condones organ harvesting leading to death.

Kathy’s passive attitude can be exemplified by comparing it to Pendrick, the main character in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and his reaction when he realizes what gruesome experiments are done at the island. The moment Pendrick suspects what is going on he
becomes defensive: “the clouded horror of my mind condensed into a vivid realization of my danger” (51). As a result the character takes action and flees the next day: “I raised this nailed stick of mine and cut at his face, but he sprang back. I hesitated a moment, then turned and fled round the corner of the house” (52). This shows that the moment when Pendrick feels that his rights might be impeded on he takes action and gets himself out of danger strongly protesting against his situation. Kathy on the other hand goes along with whatever is coming her way and never really protests. Moreover, the only attempt at delaying her deadly fate is done within the system by attempting to get a deferral. Through Kathy’s passive attitude towards the system and the seemingly natural acceptance of donations by all clones, the author makes it easy for the reader to also accept this situation as impossible to question. It is not until late in the book when the reader suddenly realizes with an uneasy feeling that this situation perhaps should not be acceptable and that these human or almost human beings are mistreated.

Choice

As shown earlier in this essay humanity is closely woven in with conscious choices and the freedom of choice. In fact The Universal Declaration of Human Rights drafted by the United Nations declares the right to life and liberty of all members of the human family. In the essay “Becoming More (Than) Human” published in the Journal of Narrative Theory, Myra J. Seaman states that in the novel Never Let Me Go “both groups claim humanity, but only those who were not “artificially” produced are free to do as they choose” (265). This statement defines the exact issue of choice in Never Let Me Go where all choices regarding life and liberties are made for the clones by their creators. In doing so the clones are effectively
dehumanized. By taking away choice from the characters which should have a claim on humanity the author imposes an uneasy feeling of injustice on the reader.

The subject of choice is strongly raised in the dystopian novel *A Clockwork Orange* in which the main character Alex is reconditioned through brainwashing techniques to change his violent behavior. In this novel the person to raise questions regarding choice is the prison chaplain. The chaplain first does this when talking to Alex, the main character, about signing up for the brainwashing project: “Is a man who chooses the bad perhaps in some way better than a man who has the good imposed upon him?” (71). This indicates that the chaplain has strong doubts about the project and whether taking away choice from a human still leaves the person as a human being. The chaplain raises this question again when the new and brainwashed Alex is presented to the public:

> He has no real choice, has he? Self-interest, fear of physical pain, drove him to that grotesque act of self-abasement. Its insincerity was clearly to be seen. He ceases to be a wrongdoer. He ceases also to be a creature capable of moral choice.  
>  
> *A Clockwork Orange* 94

The above shows the importance of the freedom to choose, even if this choice is the wrong one. This can also be linked back to Kierkegaard stating that character can be achieved through Reflection (Roberts 182). The character Alex should achieve a less violent behavior through reflection upon his actions rather than through forcefully creating repulsion towards such actions but no understanding as to why they are repulsive. In a similar manner one can argue that the choice to donate organs or not should be free for all humans and falls under the basic right to life. Considering the fact that these donations ultimately lead to death at a young age these clones are effectively robbed of their lives. Both Sartre and Kierkegaard determine that consciously chosen actions define a human and thus by denying Kathy and her friends a choice between which actions to take the system is denying them humanity. However, by
granting the clones humanity by representing them as having human qualities the author establishes an uneasy feeling when confronted by this infringement on choice.

**Narrative Perspective**

The development of the plot in *Never Let Me Go* is done through the voice of Kathy H. in a first person perspective. Moreover, it is told in such a way that the story is presented as if Kathy is speaking directly to the reader. This is done by, for example, having the narrator address the reader through the recurring phrase; “I don’t know how it was where you were, but at Hailsham”. By doing so Ishiguro establishes a narrative perspective in which Kathy is reminiscing with the reader as her conversational partner, this also strongly helps the reader connecting to Kathy and seeing her as a human being. Due to the fact that the reader experiences all events from Kathy’s perspective it also becomes easy for the author to introduce controversial topics as if they are the most normal thing in the world. An example of this is the matter of fact way with which Kathy states that she is a clone; “Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life” (137). Thus, it can be said that through making Kathy the one to tell the story the author creates a likable and recognizable narrator which can introduce uneasy topics as if they are normal.

Besides the earlier mentioned advantages of Kathy as a narrator the author also carefully chooses which words should be used to describe certain uneasy topics. This can be exemplified through the terms ‘donations’ and ‘completion’ which are both used repeatedly throughout the novel. The first term donation is defined in the Merriam Webster online dictionary as “something (such as money, food, clothes, etc.) that you give in order to help a person or organization” or “something (such as blood or a body organ) that you give to a
hospital or clinic so that it can be given to someone who needs it”. For the purpose of the novel the second definition is far more relevant because the donations in the novel refer to the organs of the clones. However, the word ‘give’ is of key importance as it indicates a certain level of voluntariness, to give something means that a choice is made by the person who concedes his or her claim on an object. In the novel, however, donations are not voluntary. The clones are brought to life with the intention of having their organs taken from them and used within the world of medicine. This clearly shows a breach of the free will closely linked to humanity by the Human Rights treaty and also by existentialist thought as expressed by Sartre and Kierkegaard.

Similarly, there is the use of the word completion which the Merriam Webster online dictionary defines as “the act or process of completing or finishing something : the state of being complete or finished”. While it is true that completion in the novel indicates that the clones have finished what they were intended for, it also means that the clone is dead as they cannot live on without their vital organs. Moreover, it is quite ironic to see that the clones are considered complete at the moment where they are missing the parts that keep them alive as (human) beings.

Both of these terms are used to disguise the truth which would most likely make a person feel quite uneasy. If the author had, for example, used terms such as ‘organ harvesting’ or ‘heart removal’ instead of donation, and ‘death’ or ‘bodily failure’ instead of completion it would have been clearer what exactly is going on. This shows that the author initially avoids these gruesome subjects only to have it dawn on the reader eventually with a clarity likely to cause unease. A comparison can be made with the slang, called nadsat, used in A Clockwork Orange by Alex and his companions. By using the slang to describe different scenes Burgess manages to partially disguise the extreme violence going on in the book: “Well, then she had to be tolchocked proper […], that brought out the red like an old friend” (10). By describing
the hitting of a woman until she bleeds, through slang and in a matter of fact way the author, in a way, protects the reader from being directly exposed to the brutality going on. In Never Let Me Go the brutal truth is also disguised by using carefully chosen words.

**Foreshadowing and Mystery**

As shown in the theoretical background Freud states that a certain level of mystery and uncertainty regarding the main character is an excellent way of creating an uneasy feeling. In Ishiguro’s Never Let Me Go this is done by the narrator reminiscing about the past and slowly revealing different details which allow the reader to discover what is happening in the novel. Due to the fact that Kathy tells the story as if the reader should be well aware of how her world works she does not take the time to explain topics such as Hailsham, donations, guardians, etcetera. This means that despite the fact that the reader early on learns that Kathy is a carer taking care of donors it is not entirely clear what exactly that means. Through Kathy’s memories the reader is exposed to a great deal of mystery and foreshadowing slowly building up to a picture that becomes more and more clear. The main source of these moments of foreshadowing are different things said by the guardians. It is interesting to note that these clues are as puzzling for the reader as they are for Kathy at the time, the same hints that the reader gets are considered hints for her as well. Peter Barry defines this as *anagnorisis* or the main character “recognizing the truth of the situation” (216). According to Barry it was Aristotle who named *anagnorisis* as one of the three key elements in the plot and the realization of what is really happening with the clones is certainly a key moment in the novel for both the narrator as well as the reader.

The book is split up in three parts and it can be said that the first part slowly reveals that Kathy and her friends are different from ‘normal’ children and there are constant hints from
the guardians as well as a number of events that indicate that something is amiss. Part two shows a far greater awareness on the part of the narrator of what is going on and the reader is by now aware that Kathy is a clone and that donations means that organs are harvested. Still at this point it is not entirely clear how exactly these donations happen. Part three then shows exactly what is happening, the reader should by now be fully aware of the situation and confronted with the controversial circumstances in which the clones find themselves. This slow build-up of tension results in the reader knowing that something is amiss throughout most of the book but does not allow the reader to pinpoint exactly what is wrong. By doing so the author creates an uneasy feeling of uncertainty and mystery when it comes to the events in the book.

**Conclusion**

To draw a conclusion as to how exactly Kazuo Ishiguro establishes the feeling of unease in *Never Let Me Go* there are several different factors to consider. The first is the setting. By establishing a world which is simultaneously similar to contemporary modern England as well as containing an unfamiliar element the author unsettles the reader. The second factor is the characters in the book which are presented to the reader as very human with human emotions, ambitions and longings, yet it becomes known that these characters are clones and thus the reader is made to wonder whether these characters are perhaps not human after all. The third factor then plays into the second factor by raising ethical dilemmas involving these clones, tempting the reader to cross ethical boundaries which the reader may not be comfortable crossing. Sometimes the reader may even find himself or herself already across these boundaries before realizing which issue exactly is being raised. The fourth factor is an extension of such ethical issues by removing the freedom of choice as an aspect of humanity
from the clones in the novel and making the reader a witness to the clones’ inescapable fate.

The fifth factor is a matter of narrative, by having the story told through the voice of one of the clones the reader is allowed intimate knowledge of the experiences Kathy and her friends encounter. This narrative is simultaneously used to disguise certain horrible and uneasy truths by using carefully chosen words to address certain topics. The sixth and final factor is then the careful build up with which the details of what is going on are slowly revealed to the reader through a series of clues and confusing events. By keeping the reader in the dark while also making the reader aware that something is amiss the author creates a certain tension which can make the reader feel uneasy.

All of these six factors mentioned above contribute to a general feeling of unease which puts the reader in a position where he or she is forced to question or wonder about the novel and the issues it raises. This means that the content of the novel is not only used to create a feeling of unease but that the feeling of unease also strengthens the impact of the content on the reader. For a dystopian novel to be successful and for an author to get a message across in a dystopian novel one might argue that the feeling of unease and the ability to create it is necessary and perhaps even of vital importance.
Works Cited


