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Created in Our Image

The Clone between Ethical Argumentation and Science-Fiction Trademark

ABSTRACT

In the present paper I discuss the fantasy of human cloning and the clone as a myth of the “culture of the copy” society. I follow the idea that science fiction is, from an ethical point of view, the literary genre most concerned with shaping possible, often unsettling worlds and contexts, while also debating the main differences between the concept of “clone” and the unsettling category of the “double” in the realm of literature.

KEYWORDS

Clone; Science-Fiction; The Double; Ethics.

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A Question of Ethics. Clones and Humans

The contemporary world has been defined by its fascination with copies. Nowadays, almost everything is made accessible through the power of creating instant duplicates, losing, in this way, the weight of tracing a history of transformations, mutations, balances and imbalances in the ambition of similarity. In *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles*, Hillel Schwartz speaks of the present culture as fully articulated around the myth of the copy, while generating duplicates as marks of cultural survival. This, however, asks for antagonist positions in following the hierarchy of copies: “In an epoch proud of instant copies but perturbed by errant copies, delighted with light weight artificial limbs but disturbed by the likelihood of clones, biology itself is invested with the rich ambivalence of myth”¹. Our bodies are receptacles and generators of stories, and “the stories we tell about fully twined bodies, across a landscape of knock-offs and replicas, lead inevitably from science to social conscience, confronting us with uncomfortable parts of ourselves”². One of the stories that emerge in this biological context is the lore of cloning, raising questions about



surviving as distinct individuals when all else perished into the realm of the copy.

Indeed, cloning, defined as the process of producing genetically identical beings, is one of the most productive phantasms of the twentieth century. “The construction of carbon copy humans”³, the promise of having ourselves impressed into another becomes a central figure in popular Science Fiction productions, as well as in apocalyptic scenarios. The clone, as well as the cyborg, is a one challenging, mysterious figure, that art, science and ethics combined try to define, problematize and, finally, appropriate as a fact “eventually”. “The advent of human cloning”, Maria Alina Salgueiro Seabra Ferreira claimed, “will inevitably entail a pressing need for redefinitions of social roles within the new, posthuman society we already inhabit”⁴. Where the philosophical implications of confronting one’s double turned into the more palpable possibility of having one’s identical copy potentially mass produced, the cultural imagery was enriched with a new plot possibility, that generated what is currently known as “clone narratives”, dealing with this “identity crisis of the new” that dominates the posthuman paradigm. Clone stories always posit the refusal of being seen as mere science fiction. Instead, they adhere to what Margaret Atwood defined as “speculative fiction” (fiction that does not invent, but follows elements already taking place, in a more or less isolated shape, in our mundane, real world). There is no doubt about how fictional clone narratives are, yet they manage to take “an imaginative leap into the future, following current socio-cultural, poetical or scientific developments to their potentially devastating conclusions”⁵, thus creating a sense of disquiet and uncanny in their reader.

We thus use the syntagm “clone narratives” as science fiction subgenre, but also as a thematic field in itself, when discussing stories that map the existence of a clone,

focus on the differences between the human race and its genomic derivatives that, by means of scientific progress, assesses as type of autonomy that is, ultimately, either threatening, generating a type of speculative literature which’s base is mapping suspicion towards science, or based on sheer empathy, questioning the ethics of such procedures and the uncanny otherness of the clone per se. Donna Haraway, one of the most prominent theoretical voices debating matters of marginal figures in the contemporary iconic culture, defines science fiction as a genre that is generally “concerned with the interpretation of boundaries between problematic selves and unexpected others and with the exploration of possible worlds in a context structured by transnational technoscience”⁶. This technoscientific context, however, is replaced by the genetic phantasms that create a pattern of cloning as a manner of duplicating being, while leaving their complexity to the perks of generation loss. According to Mark Jerng⁷, “fictional narratives of human cloning often represent clones as somewhere between singular individuals and a threatening mass or aggregate, manifesting anxieties around clones as de-individuated persons.” He offers as further example Ira Levine’s 1976 notorious novel *The Boys From Brazil*, a story revolving around the paranoid anxiety of using genetic engineering in order to gain power and, beyond the reckless experimental enthusiasm, to destroy the world’s social and political balance. In this case, the ninety-four boys cloned from one of Hitler’s cells raise the question of whether social conditions are those that influence a being’s trajectory, suggesting that, in spite of their genetic traits, the clones have the chance to become what Mark Jerng designates as “discrete individuals”. However, the incapacity of clones to individuate is a specter that haunts most of this literary subgenre, best described in



any type of spontaneity because of their dependence on each other, where humans, raised in familial contexts, possess the capacity to create and think for themselves. According to Mark Jerng, "These anxieties around individuation and distinguishing clones from humans in cloning fictions raise larger questions concerning the kind of life that counts as life, the kind of form that is sufficient or necessary to make one a human, and the forms of individuation that are possible for clones."⁸ Furthermore, in spite of their dystopian traits, these stories often emphasize the importance of cultivating the unique traits of each individual, which is why the ever increasing dystopian young adult genre makes use of the clone-issue in order to trace the teenage drama of being unique, just like everyone else.

Moreover, clone narratives assume a political background as they intentionally explore an already boiling public opinion, which's alert if fed of events such as the cloning of Dolly in 1997 or the 2001 announcement that a private firm, Advanced Cell Technologies, had sustained a cloned embryo to the six-cell stage of development. These steps forward a sinister fantasy, or, as Mark Jerng put it "nightmare scenarios drew on the fear of mass production and totalitarian control famous from Huxley's *Brave New World*"⁹. It could be said, indeed, that Huxley's dystopia was the first text to actually question the legitimacy of mass producing individuals in order to reorganize a chaotic, based on sheer-individuation, often close to alienation, society. Furthermore, this fear of what Leon Kass called "the Frankenstein hubris to create human life and increasingly to control its destiny"¹⁰ based on scenarios which must often conjured the "growing human beings for spare body parts, or creating life for our

convenience" (Mark Jerng) followed literary debates that tried to force the eventual development in the parallel language of human relations cloning would use. Cloning, bioethicist think, is not a figure of the uncanny, of the "less than human", but a mean of disfiguring human relations, inter-generational relations, the narrative of human life, memory and inheritance itself. Challenging the norms, the clone finds itself in a context that will not allow the expectation of individuation children have while separating from their parents. This handicap will ultimately be its tragedy and its own form of abuse.

Leon Kass considers that "virtually no parent is going to be able to treat a clone of himself or herself as one does a child generated by the lottery of sex. The new life will constantly be scrutinized in relation to that of the older copy... the child is likely to be ever a curiosity, ever a potential source of *déjà vu*". Francis Fukuyama speaks of the monstrous morals the possibility of cloning would generate, when people will be able to create back-up copies for their children, in the eventuality of their early deaths, in order to preserve an artificial, abusive even, connection¹¹.



A Question of the Uncanny. Clones and Doubles

Dismissive and critical in his approach to human cloning, Jean Baudrillard writes in his *Simulacra and Simulation* essay suggestively entitled Clone Story that „of all the prostheses that mark the history of the body, the double is the oldest”, further arguing that he uses the term „prosthesis” figuratively, since the double is more of an imaginary figure, just like the soul, “haunting the subject like a subtle and always averted death”.

Most clone narrative scholars (of which the best known and most frequently quoted would be Maria Alina Salgueiro Seabra Ferreira with her 2005 work *I Am the Other: Literary Negotiations of Human Cloning*) discuss the clone in relation to an older, significant phantasm of human creation: the double. “Human beings” writes Ferreira, “have always felt a strong fascination with copies, duplications, and doubles as extensions of themselves and hence as narcissistic replicating mirrors”¹². While modern and postmodern literature reasserts the distinction between the human and the clone while allowing, it always assumes, in an often polemic regime, the much explored, debated, inherited figure of the double. Ferreira sees the fantasy of human cloning as one of the most important myths of our age, in addition to the fact “that new technologies inevitably bring about a crisis in the cultural and social scene, a climatic turning point that, in our Biotechnological Age can be characterized as the advent of the posthuman, the genetically altered, the technologically enhanced, a zone where human cloning can be inscribed”¹³. Clones, however, are not just created in our dream, psychological image, as the double, in the acception given by Otto Rank, would, but actual, palpable, living potentialities, that, in a most frightening baudrillardian negative

discourse, become a mean of detaching the object from its contexts, a discourse of human simulacra. Following Walter Benjamin’s vision of the mechanical reproduction of objects, human cloning may be put in relation with the idea of repetition of the same, where what is repeated loses its aura of uniqueness, becoming „evened out to relative unimportance and worthlessness”¹⁴. In other words, just as mechanical reproduction undermines the unique aura of an object, the human being loses its aura to cloning since, as Jean Baudrillard states, once “the person is envisaged only as information to be decoded and processed”¹⁵.

Amit Marcus expresses a valid point of view in the double and clone narratives structural differences, his paper on the subject being one of the best articulated and most objective outlooks on the matter at stake. In brief, his thesis is that both double narratives and clone narratives jeopardize the idea of a unified and coherent subject and dissolve the differences between oneself and the other”, but, “unlike clone narratives that explicitly tackle with the analogy between clones and doubles, Romantic double narratives do not, directly refer to the idea of clones, which was nonexistent at the time”¹⁶. In double narratives such as Dostoyevsky’s *The Double* or Guy de Maupassant’s *The Horla* we can, at best discuss the existence of a metaphorical clone, never an actually, biologically created one.

From a thematical point of view, Marcus argues, both double narratives and clone narratives “highlight existential questions that science and rational thought cannot satisfactorily answer: what constitutes individuality? Is the human subject unified or split? What are the mental, social, and cultural processes that destabilize and dissolve the subject, and how do they function?”¹⁷. But, while the double narratives “are deeply engaged with issues of individual self-



identity”, clone narratives turn their attention to the idea of group identity, since clones and their originals are designed to live separate worlds.

By contrast, clone narratives are explicitly political, in the sense that they represent the ways in which communities of (genetically identical) individuals are formed and governed. Furthermore, cloning—combined with indoctrinate education (Naomi Mitchison’s *Solution Three* [1975], Damon Knight’s “Mary” [1964]) and operant conditioning (Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* [1932])—is a way to establish public order, impose discipline and obedience on the citizens, and ensure their loyalty to the leader and the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. Clones seem to be a cohesive, homogeneous, nameless and faceless mass that will easily overpower any individual who does not toe the line.¹⁸

Also, clone narratives lack the existential crisis beneath the idea of losing one’s identity, of having it split into a good and bad symbolic embodiment. “These aspects”, considers Amit Marcus, “are signified in most cases by the double, who is both the cause and the result of his original’s complete loss of control over his life, and of the original’s inability to be treated as a moral agent responsible for his actions.”¹⁹ This fantasy element is missing in most clone narratives, because they try to deal with the what if/s of a future possible outside world, where originals and copies would be in the position of coexisting, one’s survival not necessarily depending on the annihilation of the other. “The clones are actual entities in the science fictional world, whose existence is doubted neither by the characters nor by the reader”²⁰, confronted with an identity-

crisis in their relation to their original, a genetically identical individual that may, eventually, come to profit of this subordinated position (as it happens in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*). What is left of the previous deep connection of the being with its doubled is this baffled sense of having been dispossessed of individuality and uniqueness. Clone narratives are rarely related from the perspective of the being that has been cloned. They rather show, as Mark Jerng noticed “how the narrative of individuation is used to re-assert the distinction between human and clone even as it shows the clone achieving humanity.”²¹ Factory products that have no control over their bodies and are often questioned in terms of having or not having a soul, clones “are a manufactured and instrumentalized form of life in which life itself is brought under the complete peerview of administrative power”.²² In their philosophically connoted realizations (of which I shall further focus on the afore mentioned Kazuo Ishiguro novel, *Never Let Me Go* they are stories of accepting one’s second hand being status while achieving a personal narrative, a human sensibility and means of emancipation that restore their dignity.



A Case of Atypical Clone Story

Problematic in terms of genre, Ishiguro's novel is a good example of how clone narratives detach themselves from the science fiction conventions and let the humanist, less conventional, discourse take over. A first person narrative, related from the perspective of Kathy, a clone that assumes, in the hierarchy of a future century society, current care-taker, future organ donor (that being the final purpose of cloning in this possible world), *Never Let Me Go* may seem a non-political approach to the subject. Yet, the nostalgic approach to the early years of clones educated in an elite experimental environment which tried to undermine the idea that those of their kind lack humanity, ultimately questions the very core of anxieties concerning the impossible antagonism between what may or may not be defined as human. The book tends to ignore the means by which clones come to be: they may well live in a highly technologized context that made their existence possible in terms of a coherent mass production, yet Kathy, the narrator, does not dwell on these circumstances. She is more interested in the disfunctionality of normal relations she attempted to maintain while being strangely non-inquisitive regarding the cruelty of their destinal purpose. We agree that "the characters in this novel struggle to live through their instrumentalized bodies"²³, but they hardly ever question this instrumentalization. The parameters of their lives are inscribed in the attempt to make sense of a creative, innocent childhood and the duty of being useful in a most literal sense, once they reached adulthood. "Certainly, it feels like I *always* knew about donations in some vague way, even as early as six or seven. And it's curious, when we were older and the guardians were giving us those talks, nothing came as a complete surprise. It *was*

like we'd heard everything somewhere before"²⁴. Mark Jerng comments this paragraph in terms of the way this knowledge finally disfigures the clone's relation to her body because he would never "be able to construct himself as a developmental unity because its life would already have been pre-fabricated and determined from without", thus, what Ishiguro tries to expose is "this tension between the desire to take up one's life as a whole as a process of individuation and other narrative modalities by which a life can be counted."²⁵ An interesting suggestion Ishiguro introduces here is that the clone's emotional level will always be that of a teenager looking for sameness, for acceptance, for a model, found in people from whom they have been cloned. The "natural" generation between the clones and their models would also substitute a parent-child relation, but would also give answers to drives and emotions they cannot control. Marcus Amit comments the use of "model" as euphemism that designates the person whose clones they are in terms of a need to build one's life according to one's genetic inheritance, which, in this case, is not a unique combination of genes, but the gratification of that uniqueness. Kathy, for example, looks for her model in pornographic magazines, because she is afraid of her own unusual sexuality, but also because she wants it legitimated. "The possibles theory" attracts the clones, because they believe that knowing who is whose "model" can teach them something not only about their (future) destiny but also about their (present) character"²⁶. In a type of mirrored logic, having these human copies questioning themselves is an artifice for Ishiguro's intention in addressing a narrative that disrupts the clone-human antagonism. In this respect, while "the narrative of individuation responds to the project of cloning by asking the question: "what is the human, and how human



life is affected by the possibilities of clones”, Ishiguro, “instead of foregrounding the epistemological desire to find out what the clone *is*, it foregrounds an ethical project to discover how cloning might change how we relate to each other”²⁷.

Kazuo Ishiguro does not create an heroic narrative of cruel circumstances overcome. Rather, he rather creates a compassionate, sympathetic clone narrative facing solitude in a context of the posthuman myth realized and turned into a cruel, dismissive routine that ceased to question human dignity and bioethics.

As a conclusion, clone narratives, be their feminist realizations of the dream of self-contained wombs or stories of negotiating the monstrous likeness or what Baudrillard designated as “the hell of the same”, are insightful in deciphering the anxieties and hopes raised within the common condition of a culture of copies, able to problematize identity crisis, as well as the archetype of the double brought up to date by the prominent phantasm of biotechnology.

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Notes

¹ Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likeness, Unreasonable Facsimiles*, Zone Books, New York, 1996, p. 19.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 288.

⁴ Maria Aline Ferreira Seabra, *I Am the Other: Literary Negotiations of Human Cloning (Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy)*, Praeger, 2005, p. 4.

⁵ Katherine V. Snyder, “‘Time To Go’: The Post-Apocalyptic and the Post-Traumatic In Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*”, in *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Winter 2011), p. 470-489.

⁶ Donna Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others”, in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler (eds.), *Cultural Studies*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 295-337.

⁷ Mark Jerng, “Giving Form to Life: Cloning and Narrative Expectations of the Human”, in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, Volume 6, Number 2, June 2008, p. 369-393.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Kass 1999, p. 43, quoted by Mark Jerng, “Giving Form to Life: Cloning and Narrative Expectations of the Human”, in *Partial Answers, Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, Volume 6, Number 2, June 2008, p. 369-393.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² Maria Aline Ferreira Seabra, *I Am the Other: Literary Negotiations of Human Cloning (Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy)*, Praeger, 2005, p. 1.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p.25.

¹⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 171, quoted by Ferreira Seabra, Maria Aline, *I Am the Other: Literary Negotiations of Human Cloning (Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy)*, Praeger, 2005, p. 26.

¹⁶ Amit Marcus, “Telling the Difference: Clones, Doubles and What’s in Between”, *Connotations*, Vol. 23.1 (2013/2014), p. 369.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 371.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 372.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 375.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 376.



²¹ Mark Jerng, “Giving Form to Life: Cloning and Narrative Expectations of the Human”, *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, Volume 6, Number 2, June 2008, p. 369-393.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, Faber and Faber, E-book, p. 75.

²⁵ Amit Marcus, “Telling the Difference: Clones, Doubles and What’s in Between”, *Connotations*, Vol. 23.1 (2013/2014), p. 378.

²⁶ Mark Jerng, “Giving Form to Life: Cloning and Narrative Expectations of the Human”, in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, Volume 6, Number 2, June 2008 p. 369-393.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.