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Hubris or Salvation? The Dangers and Lures of Biotechnology in *Rappaccini's Daughter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne and *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro

Abstract: The two literary works analyzed are separated by more than a century and a half – a period during which humanity has witnessed not only spectacular scientific and technological progress, but also a diversification of attempts to define what it means to be human. However, they are united by the same concerns about the relationship between science and humanity. The aim of the paper is to examine the two works comparatively, focusing on how they portray scientifically altered beings – Beatrice and Kathy H. – as products of biotechnological ambition and moral failure. Although conceived as instruments of human progress, these figures become marginalized "others", revealing the ethical and emotional void behind scientific experimentation detached from compassion.

Keywords: Nathaniel Hawthorne; Kazuo Ishiguro; Alterity; Hybridity; Biotechnology; Clone; Human; Monster; Ethics of Creation.

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Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story *Rappaccini's Daughter* (1844) and Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005) portray scientifically modified beings, namely Beatrice, biologically modified by her father, and Kathy H., a clone created for organ donation, meant to serve or improve humanity. Nevertheless, instead of being celebrated, they are isolated and marginalized, seen as freaks, or monsters. Although these altered creatures are presented as experiments conceived in order to be beneficial to humanity, both texts actually criticize scientific ambition unchecked by ethical constraints and question how such biotechnological interventions force a redefinition of human identity. The criticism is also directed at scientific ambition pursued without responsibility, thus leading to the dehumanization and exploitation of the very beings it creates.

Both stories explore the manner in which biotechnology transforms these characters into beings that are simultaneously more and less human, thus complicating traditional notions of identity,

autonomy, and moral responsibility. The experimental subjects, though shaped by science, retain human qualities such as intelligence, empathy, creativity, and a deep yearning for connection. Ironically, these human traits only heighten their tragedy, as they are denied recognition as fully human. Their marginalization reflects a persistent societal fear of difference, one that transcends time and technological progress, bridging the gap of 150 years between the texts and suggesting that time did not fundamentally change the mindset regarding the attitude towards everything that falls outside the definition of normality. Considering all these elements, this essay will focus on Beatrice and Kathy H. as victims of grand, self-serving scientific experiments. Though biologically exceptional, they are objectified and used, tolerated only so long as they remain silent about their personhood. Despite several differences between the two texts, it becomes clear that both Beatrice (Dr. Rappaccini's daughter, a hybrid) and Kathy H. (a representative voice of all the other clones) demonstrate intelligence, creativity, empathy and a desire to live, love, and be loved – in short, all the traits we call "human".

Both texts may be included in a very old literary tradition featuring human or god-created beings (like Galateea, Thalus, Golem, Frankenstein's monster and other likewise creatures) and creators, artists or scientists engaged in less ordinary forms of creation or experimentation (like Pygmalion, Dr. Rappaccini, Dr. Frankenstein, Dr. Moreau, Dr. Jekyll etc.). These figures embody humanity's ambivalent fascination with creation: the desire to transcend natural limits, and the fear of unnatural results. Like Faustian figures, the scientists in these stories seek god-like control, but their creations often provoke anxiety rather than admiration, raising timeless questions about what it means to be human.

Both Hawthorne's and Ishiguro's texts are set in the real world, not in an uncertain future, but rather in a familiar past. According to the introductory paragraph, Hawthorne's story is set "very long ago"[1], in Padua, probably in the sixteenth century, "at the moment of modern medicine's birth"[2]. Kazuo Ishiguro's novel (2005) is set in England, in the late 1990s, bringing the action even closer to the reading public, and it is connected to a series of scientific events that raised the level of anxiety generated by genetic intervention, the most notable of which being the first successful cloning of a mammal, the famous sheep Dolly[3]. Even though, apparently, both texts may have traits that would allow their inclusion in the genre of science-fiction[4], they actually lack the scientific details that would definitely inscribe them in such a category, dwelling instead on the reactions, impressions and feelings of particular characters, which complicates the understanding of the texts. Moreover, both Rappaccini's house and the Hailsham school of clones are located in the real world, isolated or hidden from it, and not set in a distant future as in other dystopian stories (such as Huxley's, Orwell's, or Attwood's). Precisely this real setting becomes all the more dangerous and/or difficult to accept as it aligns with conspiracy theories that present horrifying scenarios unfolding in our world, hidden from public view[5].

The narrative perspective of the texts further deepens their elusiveness, as subjective and unreliable narrators supplement the limited knowledge of the scientific

background with feelings, impressions, memories and an imperfect knowledge of the world and of the unfolding events. Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, for instance, is narrated by Kathy H., a clone who remembers her past life, especially her relationship with Ruth and Tommy, in a narrative through which the readers gradually discover that all of them are clones, created and raised for organ donation. However, beside the few human beings with whom they interacted, the clones are isolated, knowing nothing about the circumstances of their creation. Kathy mostly recalls the relationships with the other clones, with few references to normal people, like the guardians at the school where the clones were raised. However few, though, it was mainly through these interactions that the most horrific details of organ donation are revealed to Kathy, alongside the truth about the negative attitude people have towards the clones that provoke fear and disgust and are better off out of their sight. In this way, "Kathy's narrative is part memoir and part rights claim, demonstrating the ability of autobiographical narrative to communicate stories of exploitation and injustice by giving a voice to marginalized social groups struggling on the fringes of supposedly democratic societies"[6].

By comparison, the perspective in *Rappaccini's Daughter* seems more objective, through a third-person narrative, but the ambiguity of many of the story's aspects is in keeping with other texts by the same author in which the protagonist is "destined for an experience in which reason and imagination, consciousness and the unconscious, become confused"[7]. It is not only the experience of the protagonist who is confused, but also that of the narrator who does not appear to know more than Giovanni, giving no explanations on Dr. Rappaccini's or Dr. Baglioni's scientific experiments or on their ulterior motivations, while also insisting on Giovanni's lack of understanding of what he experiences. Moreover, according to Carol Marie Bensick, "the reader is urged to ignore or allegorize the experience of the characters in their situation by a very confident, in fact, quite dogmatic narrator"[8]. Therefore, a better understanding of the text would be to free ourselves, as readers, from the "narrator's misty moralizations"[9]. Bensick's reading of the text actually implies that, instead of dealing with an omniscient narrator, readers need to fill in the gaps in knowledge typical of a subjective, limited instance that offers half-truths painted with emotions, impressions and, even prejudice.

This choice of subjective narrative perspectives in these texts both enriches and complicates their meaning. In the case of Ishiguro's novel, readers already establish an emotional bond with Kathy H. before learning that she is a clone, which leads to a more emotional connection to their fate and to a deeper understanding of the terrible implications of cloning for medical purposes from the victim's perspective. Only towards the end of the novel do readers become acquainted with the feelings of rejection, fear and even disgust that normal people feel towards the clones, feelings that the readers might have shared even unconsciously, from a deeply engrained anxiety generated by the presence of "the other". By changing the focus, the reader does not fall into the trap of one's prejudice that might have tainted the reaction towards clones. In Hawthorne's short story, the narrative takes a reversed turn. The

narrator guides the reading towards othering those who are different, an attitude enhanced by the reactions of both Giovanni and Baglioni towards Beatrice. It is only at the end of the short story that we are allowed a brief insight into Beatrice's mind, as she pleads for acceptance and love, and so, readers are mostly inclined to adopt the attitude of fear and rejection towards a strange creature.

The marginalization and isolation of the created beings, Beatrice and the clones, the negative attitude of people and their refusal to interact with them, have often been represented in literature as a reflection of the "other", while in this type of speculative fiction, the other takes the form of the monster. The "monster" in literature is a dangerous, transgressive being that challenges our presumptions of normality, order and control. Coming from the Latin "monstrare", the monster "demonstrates" or "shows" human flaws and errors. According to Chris Baldick, "in a world created by a reasonable God, the freak or lunatic must have a purpose: to reveal visibly the results of vice, folly, and unreason, as a warning (Latin, *monere*: to warn) to erring humanity"[10]. Thus, the monster is dangerous because of what it represents or reveals about human beings and the world they live in, and, this is why it is considered mostly as a cultural product, the outward ugliness or monstrosity only pointy to the others' hidden flaws:

> The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read[11].

Another typical aspect connected to literary monsters is that they resist clear classifications, either enhancing the differences (with bodies that are externally incoherent, like Frankestein's monster), or erasing them (with bodies that do not differ from normality, like Beatrice, or the clones, but which are still inherently different). As a result, they become dangerous because they challenge our understanding of what "human", or "normal" actually means. In fact, the monster is an incarnation of difference, understood in various hypostases, according to the social or cultural tensions of a certain historical moment, or, as Jeffrey Cohen puts it, "for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual"[12].

Beatrice and the clones do not have the physical appearance of monsters, blending easily with the "normal" people. Nevertheless, they are still considered monstrous and hence shunned and isolated by the others, an attitude which reinforces Jeffery Cohen's assertion about the monster being a cultural construct. The fear generated by Beatrice or Kathy H. does not come from a gothic-like deformity, but from a more elusive difference invisible at the surface—they are a better version of normal people due to their genetic enhancements and so, they are deemed unacceptable, generating also a fear of competition with ordinary human being which might disrupt well-settled hierarchies.

Beatrice's "monstrosity" is alluded to from the beginning of the text. The first

time Giovanni sees her, Dr. Rappaccini and the garden, he is struck by a series of suspicious impressions: among them we could mention the doctor's attitude as if he were "walking among malignant influences, such as deadly beasts, or evil snakes, or deadly spirits"[13], or the fact that he uses a mask while tending to the plants in his garden, when his daughter seems perfectly safe and at ease there. Later, he is further puzzled by the death of a lizard approaching a gorgeous shrub growing in the middle of the garden, by the death of an insect flying too close to Beatrice and by the withering of the flowers he offered to her. His suspicions that something might be wrong with Dr. Rappaccini's garden are confirmed by Dr. Baglioni, Rappaccini's professional rival, who sees the latter as a man of doubtful character, with no respect for human life, one who "cares infinitely more for science than for mankind"[14].

Dr. Rappaccini, therefore, joins the list of scientists, like Dr. Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll or Dr. Moreau, who are brilliant but oblivious to the moral implications of their experiments. The literary depictions of these unconventional scientists are in keeping with the rapid scientific and technological development of the nineteenth century, showing that "the seeming worship of science and technology mainly emanating from nineteenth century developments in these areas has never been complete, and the anxieties and distrust were often voiced in literature by the transfer of the negative representation from wizards and alchemists to (mad) scientists"[15]. What becomes more unsettling in the case of Dr. Rappaccini by comparison to Dr. Frankenstein is that the former does not reanimate dead matter, but concentrates "on hybridizing life, blurring and crossing the boundaries between animal and human, in the process exalting the animal and dehumanizing the human being"[16]. Beatrice, a living and breathing being, thus becomes a monster in Giovanni's mind because she is no longer completely human, but a human-plant hybrid who is all the more dangerous as it physically looks like a very beautiful woman.

Consequently, Giovanni cannot reconcile the repulsion and fear generated by Beatrice in him, with the attraction for the beautiful girl. The more he learns about Rappaccini from Baglioni (and obviously inattentive to the professional jealousy evident in Baglioni's reaction to Rappaccini), the more he becomes unsure of his love and he starts believing he was poisoned and trapped. As a result of these conflicting emotions, he accepts to give Beatrice Baglioni's potion, supposed to turn her into a normal human being. The danger of not doing so, according to Baglioni, is Giovanni's becoming part of Rappaccini's twisted experiment with terrible consequences: death, or "perhaps a fate more awful still"[17]. Thus, it is evident that some sort of transformation of Giovanni, his becoming something else than what they see as "normal" human being, would make him a monster, which would be worse than death.

For the nineteenth century reader, Beatrice's "monstrosity" is especially dangerous for several reasons connected to the time's scientific and social developments. The enthusiasm for science and technology that animated the mind of the nineteenth century individuals was counterbalanced by a distrust and anxiety concerning these scientific and technological outcomes and many of the time's monstrous literary

creations are, in fact, reflections of the fear of the potential mechanization of the human spirit, a mockery of nature or an abomination that could not have been produced in nature[18]. While she seems to be, in Giovanni's eyes, "the human sister of the vegetable ones"[19], Beatrice becomes an embodiment of such a scientific abomination created by hybridization or mixture of botanical and human elements. Dr. Rappaccini is the creator of this monster because scientific curiosity allowed him to colonize the human body[20], to create a new body out of a mixture or hybridization, and to transform the body's interior into something not only venomous and dangerous, but also undetectable by the others, betrayed only occasionally by the poisonous breath of the otherwise almost perfect Beatrice.

In other words, one of the many transgressions of Dr. Rappaccini was to make his daughter both poisonous and desirable, luring the innocent Giovani into an ungodly trap. Such a representation is highly problematic from several perspectives, all touching nineteenth century sensitivities which have been perpetuated up to present times, and all connected to hierarchies of various sort (social, gender-connected, racial, ethnic), power and control. Giovanni lost the control over his own senses by falling in love, which gave Beatrice power over him. However, this power is not that of true love, but one artificially induced by her poisonous breath, as Dr. Baglioni suggests by telling Giovanni the story of a woman who had been nourished with poison from birth until she became poisonous and used as a weapon to lure Alexander the Great. Hence, Dr. Baglioni suggests not only that Beatrice is poisonous, but also that she contaminated Giovanni, by gradually naturalizing him in her poisonous environment.

Beatrice became "a product of a kind of botanical miscegenation" existing in "a taxonomic border area between human and nonhuman, European and non-European"[21], while the emotion Beatrice produces in Giovanni is "a mixture (hybrid) of love and horror, equating thus Beatrice's poisonness with racial "'commixture'"[22]. Anne Brickhouse explains that Beatrice only appears human, without being completely so, so a love relationship between her and Giovanni is impossible because it would "contaminate"[23] him. He tests himself by breathing upon a spider who withers and dies. This is the proof that he was contaminated himself, and his human nature was altered, which leads him to confront her, throwing hurtful accusations that betray his fear of miscegenation and degradation:

> 'Accursed creature that you are'! he shouted, with all the venom of contempt and anger. … 'You have poisoned me too! You have poured poison into my veins until they are full of it! You have made me as loathsome, hideous, detestable, and fatal as yourself! O wonder of the world – made up of monstrous hideousness'![24]

As Faye Ringel aptly points out, this fear of being tainted comes out of the fear of "the diminution of our humanity. We fear the Beast Without who figures forth the Beast Within"[25]. The monster cannot be allowed to live among "normal" human beings because it not only challenges the representation of normality and the sense of control, but also the "purity" of humanity, threatening to contaminate it with its

monstrous features. Baglioni's reaction to Beatrice equally places her in the realm of monstrosity as he devises a potion to revert her to normality: "We might even succeed in bringing the poor child back within the limits of ordinary nature, from which her father's madness has estranged her"[26]. Their efforts to make Beatrice "ordinary" are in contrast to Dr. Rappaccini's desire to make her extraordinary, hence, he finds it impossible to understand why Beatrice is saddened by Giovanni's rejection:

> 'My father', said Beatrice, feebly – and still, as she spoke, she kept her hand upon her heart – 'wherefore didst thou inflict this miserable doom upon thy child'?
> 'Miserable'! exclaimed Rappaccini. 'What mean you, foolish girl? Dost thou deem it misery to be endowed with marvellous gifts, against which no power nor strength could avail an enemy? Misery, to be able to quell the mightiest with a breath? Misery, to be as terrible as thou art beautiful? Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil, and capable of none'?[27]

These words made some critics remark that Rappaccini is not necessarily an evil being, a cold, emotionless scientist, performing an experiment on his daughter to improve her and give her means to protect herself: "Rappaccini erred, as many fathers do, imagining that he could protect his daughter from the world. And he erred even more in his preternatural fear that the world outside his isolated garden, the world of human relationships, would be so evil that it required such extreme protection"[28]. It is, from a certain point of view, an understandable, though misguided, form of protection by many fathers who are afraid that the world will surely harm their daughters. The problem appears in the means he used to give protection to his child. Even though his purpose is not evil, the results become dangerous, because he tampered with nature, trying to gain control over it. His experiments have created poisons which nature would not have created without his intervention and "his probing and relentless mind has uncovered their potential evil"[29].

Ironically, Baglioni's antidote is not different from Rappaccini's poisonous plant and it brings about Beatrice's death and not her salvation. It is clear, thus, at the end, that Beatrice is the victim of two scientific ambitions, identified by Anthony Cerulli and Sarah L. Berry as the innovative scientist, Rappaccini and the orthodox practitioner, Baglioni, for the imposition of a certain scientific perspective. However, the critics note, "Hawthorne ends the story with profound equivocality, for the gripping dénouement does not reveal which medical practice is ultimately more effective. Hawthorne instead directs the reader's attention to the harmfulness of the men's 'warfare' itself"[30].

Beatrice's fate is basically in the hands of scientists whose interests are spurred by different goals. Her father is not deprived of love, but his scientific pursuits harm his own daughter, Giovanni is a mere student who does not understand much and acts upon impulse and with selfishness, while Baglioni cynically uses both Giovanni and Beatrice for his professional revenge over a fellow scientist. Beatrice, therefore, is seen less like a human being and more like an

experiment to be continued or discontinued upon will. Basically, Cerulli and Berry conclude by stating that "Baglioni defeats Rappaccini by having Giovanni destroy his experiment"[31], but this "experiment" is a living and breathing human being who tried to protect her right to live and to demonstrate her humanity: "though my body be nourished with poison, my spirit is God's creature, and craves love as its daily food"[32]. Insisting on the duality body-spirit, Beatrice tries to dissociate the monstrosity of her mortal body, of the sinful flesh from the divine nature of the spirit, thus appealing to Giovanni in trying to persuade him that humanity lies in the spirit. The body may be maimed by science and scientists, but the spirit remains untouchable. Eventually, Beatrice realizes she is in an impossible position and she will never be loved: "I would fain have been loved, not feared"[33]. She, then, decides to take Baglioni's potion, knowing that it will bring her end:

> 'I am going, father, where the evil, which thou hast striven to mingle with my being, will pass away like a dream – like the fragrance of these poisonous flowers, which will no longer taint my breath among the flowers of Eden. Farewell, Giovanni! Thy words of hatred are like lead within my heart-but they, too, will fall away as I ascend. Oh, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine'?[34]

Her final decision is the only moment when Beatrice assumes control of her own life, choosing to end it rather than continue living in confinement and disgrace. However, by addressing Giovanni last, after saying farewell to her father, she places the blame more on him, by suggesting that there is a hidden poison within his heart as well, a poison that brought her misfortune more than what her father did to her. It is this prejudice of most human beings that makes them inflexible and mean, unable to see the good beneath different appearances. The ambiguity of the story, therefore, lies in the difficulty of assigning guilt. Though there is a clear tendency to blame Rappaccini for experimenting on his own daughter, a scientific practice of questionable morality, it could be more valid to blame Giovanni for his obtuseness and rigidity in his rejection of Beatrice, or even Baglioni whose schemes born out of professional jealousy led to Beatrice's death. In the end, we cannot help wondering whether Rappaccini was not right in protecting his daughter from a world and from people who are clearly harmful and mean.

As suggested in Hawthorne's short story, many scientific excesses are born of fear – fear of the world's wickedness in Rappaccini's case, not entirely unjustified given the other characters' actions in the story, or fear of death, which leads to the creation of clones meant to provide a constant influx of organs to save human lives in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*. Similar to *Rappaccini's Daughter*, Ishiguro's novel is almost entirely deprived of scientific details, the focus being on the clones' lives as children and adults and their interaction with "normal" people. Another similarity lies in their marginalization and isolation from human society, as both Beatrice and the clones are confined to seemingly protective, familiar spaces. In the case of Beatrice, Dr. Rappaccini's house and

garden function as both shelter and prison. She does not leave the space and leads an apparently happy life in her father's garden, surrounded by "her sisters", the strange, poisonous flowers, without ever considering it a prison or having the wish to escape.

The clones, though without a family, appear to live in a sort of family-like environment, first at Hailsham, a sort of boarding school, then at the Cottages, more similar to a college, where they are educated and form friendship bonds with the other children-clones. The clones gain a certain degree of freedom as they pass from one institution to the other, until the moment they become carers and then donors. They are also allowed to interact with other people, have a house, drive around in their own car, nevertheless, they are more likely to spend most of their lives in the company of other clones. The process of donation and recovery is done in certain facilities for clones only and the donors are surrounded and cared for by other clones. Thus, Beatrice and the clones do not realize that their homes are prisons, meant not only to protect them from the others, but also (or mostly) to protect the others from them and to limit the interaction between these odd creatures and the rest of the world. The control over their lives is constant, yet almost invisible, which allows both Beatrice and Kathy and her friends to lead good, even happy lives.

In Hawthorne's short story, for instance, Rappaccini's presence is always felt throughout the encounters between the lovers, while the children-clones are aware of the guardians, of the fences and the surrounding woods and of the rules that must be followed, but they do not feel oppressed by these aspects. As adults, the clones are supervised (by some people identified as "they"), and somebody else takes decisions such as: how long somebody is allowed to be a carer, when they start donating, how the carers are assigned to specific donors. There is, in fact, no real sense of owning their body and deciding for themselves. Nevertheless, the control does not appear problematic since these beings have never known another form of existence and it is also so subtle that it does not feel coercive. It also offers them a kind of comfort and familiarity, a safe space of routine actions, which render the impression of being watched almost undetectable.

There is no moment of great revelation, in the sense that both Beatrice and the clones know that they are different from the others, but it is not clear how and when they learned that. The information was insidiously transmitted to them to allow them to become gradually familiarized with their situation and not be frightened or shocked. Kathy recalls that: "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"[35]. Kathy's recollection of the discovery of the truth points out to an attitude that many of us share, that of ignoring what we do not like, a sort of knowing and not knowing that makes it easier for them to accept their fate.

The information about donation is not only insidiously inserted in their education, but also connected to pleasant things. For instance, Shameem Black argues that they habit of creating art objects and exchanging them with other students familiarizes

the clones to donating part of themselves. The circulation of art reflects the circulation of body parts, accustoms the students with the act of donation (even makes it desirable) and strengthens the bonds among the clones, making them "lose their ability to imagine themselves outside the system that governs their collective lives. As a result, they find it difficult to consider independent action"[36].

The novel, structured by Kathy's memories, begins with a depiction of Hailsham School where she spent the first years of her life and formed the most meaningful bonds with other clones, especially Ruth and Tommy. Hailsham, filled with fond childhood memories, represents an anchor and a mental safe haven for her and for her colleagues and friends, though, in reality, it is a prison surrounded by fences and guardians instead of teachers. The children, living a rather happy life in what appears to be an ordinary boarding school for orphans, do not realize (though they sometimes instinctively feel it) that it is more of a prison, "a place of conditioning"[37], or a "pen"[38], where they are trained to care for one another and where the abusive system that oppresses them is perpetuated, during the process of organ donation. The clones become "carers" before donating organs. Each clone can donate up to four times before "completing", as the word "dying" is never used. It is not clear what exactly a carer does and we only find out what Kathy explains, namely that she is a very good carer, which permitted her to postpone donation:

> I do know for a fact they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too. My donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as 'agitated', even before fourth donation. Okay, maybe I am boasting now. But it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well, especially that bit about my donors staying 'calm'. I've developed a kind of instinct around donors. I know when to hang around and comfort them, when to leave them to themselves; when to listen to everything they have to say, and when just to shrug and tell them to snap out of it[39].

From her description, these carers do not perform any medical activities, being rather part of a sort of supporting system, the closest, probably, the clones get to a family. Basically, the role of carer is more that of a surrogate family for clones who are dying and who, unlike humans, have no other family to be near them in their final moments. So, a good career is considered one that keeps the donor peaceful or, as Roberto del Valle Alcalá puts it, "according to Kathy, what makes a good, successful carer is their ability to ensure a state of docile passivity and consent among their donors"[40]. Ironically, the quality of care allows some donors to reach four donations by the end, which actually extends their ordeal, and the carers, who will eventually become donors themselves, support this oppressive system. This attitude recalls Michel Foucault's analysis of "docile bodies", which can be manipulated, trained, modified to become docile, becoming puppets in the hands of those who hold power:

> Finally, there is the procedure: it involves an uninterrupted, constant

> coercion, which supervises the processes of activity rather than its result, and is exercised according to a codification that divides time, space, movement as closely as possible. These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the body's operations, which ensured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility–utility, might be called 'disciplines'. Many disciplinary methods had long existed – in monasteries, in armies, in workshops[41].

Foucault's mention of the disciplinary methods that have been used in controlled environment may be applied to the situation of Hailsham school, where the movements of the children are closely followed, their activities monitored, so that they become accustomed to this constant supervision that prevents the development of a sense of personal freedom. They see their worth only in connection to the success of the actions of caring and donating, which is the result of the education they received at Hailsham. Their only purpose is to serve and sacrifice themselves, by supplying a constant flux of organs for donation, without creating trouble. Thus, the whole system that controls the clones is devised to stifle, from a very young age, any form of individuality and free will. In this light, Kelly Rich reads this novel as a conflict between the individual and the state, suggesting that modern states favor the effacement of the individual in favor of the community's benefit: "As many have suggested, the novel forces us to contend with the disappearance of the individual and the emergence of the social aggregate, as well as the difficult, often alien emotions that arise from its dark biopolitical premise"[42]. The criticism of the unbalanced relationship between the individual and the state in modern society is also mentioned by Titus Levy who considers that:

> Kathy and the other clones are simply following a common plot line that anticipates the submission of radical autonomy to the social responsibilities required by the state. […] Kathy's admission that she will soon give up her personal freedoms by way of organ donation does not represent a mutually beneficial tradeoff between state and citizen but, rather, an unjust capitulation to the demands of an oppressive social order[43].

There is a cynical representation of the individual-state relationship, or between individual desires and self-worth and social responsibilities through the disparity between the rich inner life of the clones and the fact that the society treats them like objects. In order to highlight this imbalance, instead of reflecting a maturing of the protagonist, which would be in keeping with the bildungsroman format of her memory narrative, into understanding and fulfilling a meaningful role in society as an individual, the novel dwells on the system's tyrannical and immoral form of control that erases individuality and treats some of its members as spare parts. Even though raised in a placed in which they were well-treated, educated, encouraged to create and to form connections, the clones are conditioned not to react, or ponder upon their situation.

In addition, the need for organs on the medical market makes the state and

the public support this abusive system. What frightens, therefore, in this novel, more that the clone situation itself, is the perpetuation of this abusive system and the lack of reaction from any of the participants, beneficiaries or victims. As Titus Levy puts it, "atrocity can become normalized, hidden in the routines of daily life"[44]. This extreme story actually alludes to so many other terrible abusive systems of contemporary society. Complementary to this view, Shameem Black directly links the situation of the clones with that of the post-colonial British state, suggesting that the novel is a critique of the attitude of the state towards the undervalued citizens, exploited to the benefit of the more fortunate ones:

> On the national level, the creation of a service class for organ donation extends the principles of the British class system to its most horrifying extreme. […] As a global metaphor, the condition of the students also speaks to the fate of postcolonial and migrant laborers who sustain the privileges of First World economies, the fortune of soldiers called on to serve in Afghanistan or Iraq, or the collateral damage of civilians killed in war so that other nations might maintain their power. While Ishiguro rarely refers explicitly in the novel to such phenomena, he makes this parallel between the clones and service classes easy to draw[45].

The situation of the clones represents in an extreme and terrifying way the system of oppression that supports the well-being of the Western world, also pointing to the mechanisms of oppression that erase any form of rebellion in the clones and the indifference of the people to their fate, a direct parallel to the contemporary sense of indifference to the tragedies that happen elsewhere and do not affect us directly. This attitude is called by social psychologists the "bystander effect", a term "that refers to ways in which ordinary people ignore or remain indifferent to blatant human suffering" which is generated by a series of factors connected to responsibility, an inability to identify with the victim, the feeling that there is nothing to be done[46]. In criticizing this attitude, Ishiguro chooses to make Kathy's narrative relatable in order to render the clones' plight visible and painful and raise awareness to the shady, unseen areas of our world. Thus, if Hawthorne's story considered a singular experiment, the work of an eccentric scientist whose creation does not have an impact on the general population, Ishiguro's novel has a wider reach into the social environment, by making the results of the scientific endeavor a generalized reality whose negative and irresponsible outcomes are ignored by the general public.

Thus, when the two texts are seen in relation, another even more terrifying aspect is revealed, namely, that in a century and a half, the scientific experiments that were considered dangerous and immoral become normal and acceptable. It suggests that the development of science also came with blunting the public's concern for the potentially problematic outcomes of scientific discoveries. What does not change, though, in more than one-hundred years, is the fear and rejection of "the other". The same repulsion and fear with which Giovanni looks at Beatrice are felt by the clones in their interactions with various people.

The first reaction of rejection, and in fact the full awareness of difference and marginalization, comes from the confrontation with the school's benefactor when they are students at Hailsham: "Madame was afraid of us. But she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders. We hadn't been ready for that. It had never occurred to us to wonder how we would feel, being seen like that, being the spiders"[47]. It is for the first time that the clone-children feel that they are "monstrous". Though the word "monster" is never explicitly used in the novel, the comparison with the spiders alludes to the people's interpretation that the clones are not "human enough". Nathan Snaza considers that "they are, rather, an ambiguous inhuman – part animal and part machine. Clones are machinic animals, created as a technological means for maintaining human lives"[48]. Thus, in order to accept this process of clones used for organ donation, it is imperative that they should not be seen as humans. Killing Beatrice is, likewise, easier because she is plant-human hybrid, a monster who cannot live in human society, as Giovanni says when he calls her a "poisonous thing"[49].

The reference to spiders appears three times in the novel. The first two times this word is connected to Madame's reaction when the clones approach her, first when they are students, and, the second time, years later, when Kathy and Tommy go to her in search for answers about the deferral of donations based on the rumor that if clones prove they truly love one another, organ donation might be postponed. When they stop her, she looks "as if a pair of large spiders was set to crawl towards her"[50]. Soon afterwards, Kathy mentions Madame's reaction to Miss Emily, the former headmistress at Hailsham and Madame's partner, to see her reaction: "Madame never liked us. She's always been afraid of us. In the way people are afraid of spiders and things"[51]. Miss Emily's answer is indicative not of Madame's particular attitude, but of every other person's: "We're *all* afraid of you. I myself had to fight back my dread of you all almost every day I was at Hailsham. There were times I'd look down at you all from my study window and I'd feel such revulsion"[52]. It is for the first time that readers have a direct contact with the attitude of normal people, through their words, and not mediated by Kathy's perspective. However, Miss Emily insists that, in spite of their fear, they took willingly part of the Hailsham experiment that was meant to demonstrate to the world that the clones are human, by offering them a humanistic education and encouraging their creativity:

> Most importantly, we demonstrated to the world that if students were reared in humane, cultivated environments, it was possible for them to grow to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being. Before that, all clones – or *students,* as we preferred to call you – existed only to supply medical science. In the early days, after the war, that's largely all you were to most people. Shadowy objects in test tubes[53].

The Hailsham experiment seems to have been successful enough to make people acknowledge the existence of the clones who are more human than they expected, but, unfortunately, the result was

not a betterment of their situation but the termination of the experiment, because,

> However uncomfortable people were about your existence, their overwhelming concern was that their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease. So for a long time you were kept in the shadows, and people did their best not to think about you. And if they did, they tried to convince themselves you weren't really like us[54].

It is exactly the appeal to the clones' humanity that make people more uncomfortable at the idea of using someone similar for organ donation and here lies the predicament of the novel: is it really a matter of deciding whether the clones can be considered human or not, or is it a conscious effort from the establishment to see the clones as nonhuman in order to be more easily to harvest their organs?

The whole point of the narrative told by Kathy is to demonstrate the humanity of the clones and to create a sense of relatedness and empathy from the reader, as a representative of the population, before revealing that the speaker is a clone. It becomes obvious during the unfolding story that the clones are capable of creativity, empathy and even love. Titus Levy suggests that, "in some ways, Kathy's narrative constitutes a courageous act of protest by giving a marginalized minority a form of humanistic expression"[55]. Demonstrating her humanity in her storytelling, therefore, would be a brave act of demonstrating her individuality as well as her complexity as a human being. Nathan Snaza has a different opinion, suggesting that, while identifying with Kathy, the narrator, we should not presume that she is human like us, but become inhuman as she is and alter our perspective of what human and inhuman actually means, by embracing diversity: "We need an education that does not set out to make us into full human beings, but rather enables us to affirm the continual process of becoming-other-than-we-are. This becoming-other, in turn, may open us toward new, nonanthropocentric forms of politics"[56].

The ending of the novel is more disturbing that the ending of *Rappaccini's Daughter*. Beatrice's death brings a sense of closure, reassuring the readers that there is still the possibility that scientific experiments may be controlled. Unlike Beatrice, the clones will go on as part of an abusive system, with an even worse fate than that of Kathy H. and the clones of Hailsham. As far as Kathy is concerned, she needs to face her own "inhumanity" and accept her dire fate without any possibility of control. From Madame and Miss Emily's words, she understands that the situation of the clones will be more terrifying in the future: "You wouldn't be able to sleep for nights on end if you knew what goes on in some of those places"[57]. Clones will be raised like animals for slaughter, without education or decent living conditions, to prevent their development and to soothe the public's guilt when they are killed. The last clones to have enjoyed a humanistic education will live their short lives aware of their terrible condition and incapable to do anything to fight it. Ironically, it is exactly the humanistic education they were given that makes them understand exactly their tragic situation. Referring to an episode when

she sees Kathy dancing to the song *Never Let Me Go* with a pillow in her arms as if it were a baby, Madame explains: "I saw a new world coming rapidly. Yes, a world more closely tied to science, one even more efficient. With more methods of curing old diseases. Agreed. But a harsh and cruel world"[58]. Her last words to Kathy and Tommy are: "Poor creatures"[59]!

Beatrice and the clones are creatures, hybrids, inhuman creations that frighten and attract at the same time. Hubristic ambitions lead to various forms of tampering with nature, and justifications are always supported by presumed beneficial results: enhancing human traits in the case of Beatrice, and saving lives in the case of the clones. Yet, what emerges is not salvation but suffering, as those beings are denied agency, dignity, and recognition as human. Their fates reveal how easily noble intentions can mask exploitation when ambition is untempered by compassion. In conclusion, in a modern world where technological progress brings huge leaps forward, redefining the human becomes a necessity:

> Far from being the n-th variation in a sequence of prefixes that may seem both endless and somewhat arbitrary, the posthuman condition introduces a qualitative change in our thinking about what exactly constitutes the basic unit of common reference for our species, our politics, and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet. This issue raises serious questions about the very structures of our shared identity – as humans – amid the complexity of contemporary science, politics, and international relations. Discourses and representations of the non-human, inhuman, anti-human, unhuman, and posthuman proliferate and overlap in our technologically mediated, globalized societies[60].

As Rosi Braidotti argues, the posthuman condition forces us to rethink identity, power, and kinship across species and technologies and, in our contemporary world where technological progress accelerates beyond moral consensus, redefining "the human" has become a philosophical and ethical necessity. Both Hawthorne's hybrid Beatrice and Ishiguro's cloned Kathy embody this crisis of definition. They exist at the threshold – simultaneously human and other, victims of scientific creation yet testaments to enduring humanity through love, creativity, and self-awareness. The fear they inspire in others – Giovanni's horror before Beatrice and society's revulsion toward the clones – does not reflect their monstrosity, as we might be tempted to consider at a first, superficial look, but humanity's terror of difference, of losing control over the hierarchy it built. Whether reflected in the patriarchal unease of Hawthorne's tale or in the biopolitical complacency of Ishiguro's dystopia, these anxieties reveal that scientific hubris is often intertwined with social prejudice: gendered, classed, and racialized fears masquerading as moral or natural order.

Seen together, the two works create an arc over the years in discussing both the potential and limitation of science, the moral responsibility for scientific experimentation, even when it might be in the benefit of humanity and the constant need to ponder on what it means to be human. In the nineteenth century, Hawthorne's fable warns against personal arrogance cloaked in paternal love; in the twenty-first, Ishiguro's

elegy exposes institutionalized exploitation disguised as collective good. The moral dilemma at the core of these two stories is whether creation without compassion can ever lead to salvation. Ultimately, both authors suggest that the true measure of progress lies not in transcending human limits, but in reaffirming human values – empathy, responsibility, and recognition of the other. Without these, scientific mastery becomes another form of blindness, and salvation, a poisoned promise.

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Notes

1. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" in *Selected Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, edited by Alfred Kazin, New York, Fawcett Premier, 1966, p. 115.

2. Stephanie Browner, "Doctors, Bodies and Fiction", in Shirley Samuels (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to American Fiction, 1780-1865*, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 219. In this essay Browner studies at length the representation of the body in nineteenth century American fiction, mostly connected to the development of medicine and its potential power to decipher the mysteries of the human body, coupled with raising anxieties about such scientific endeavors. She argues that the story of "Rappaccini's Daughter" may be connected to late sixteenth century Padua and the famous Andreas Vesalius, considered to be the father of modern human anatomy. Hawthorne criticized unchecked medical ambitions, but opens up more complex discussions about the manner in which science sees the human body,

3. The sheep Dolly was the first mammal cloned in 1996, and it lived until 2003.

4. Alfred Bendixen considers that "Hawthorne rarely gets the credit he deserves for helping to invent science fiction" ("Towards History and Beyond: Hawthorne and the American Short Story", in Alfred Bendixen and James Nagel (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to the American Short Story*, Blackwell publishing, 2010, p. 65), and duly so, the American writer has mostly been appraised for his use of allegory and symbol. *Rappaccini's Daughter* has mostly been analyzed as an allegory of sin and pride and put in relation to the numerous texts to which it alludes, from the Bible, to Dante, Milton, Ovid, Spenser, Machiavelli and modern scientific projects (Algis Valiunas, "The Last Temptation of Science", in *The New Atlantis*, No. 30, 2011, p. 120). Kazuo Ishiguro's novel could be more easily included in the genre of science fiction, but the lack of scientific details makes the classification of the novel more difficult. Most critics acknowledges its affinity to science fiction, but suggested it is not quite that. Gabrielle Griffin notes that the novel is a form of "critical science fiction" but that at its heart lies "the question of the relative status of the clones and of what it means to be human" ("Science and the Cultural Imaginary: The case of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*", in *Textual Practice*, vol. 23, nr. 4, 2009, p. 653). Other critics, though, link it to dystopian literary texts, and even to sentimental literature and abolitionist writings of the nineteenth century (Karl Shaddox, "Generic Considerations in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*", in *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 35, Nr. 2, 2013). This rather ambiguous approach that resists clear-cut classification has actually proven beneficial to the texts which have been analyzed from a multitude of critical perspective and are still open to interpretation.

5. Leona Toker and Daniel Chertoff, "Reader Response and the Recycling of Topoi in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*", in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, Vol. 6, Nr. 1, 2008, p. 165.

6. Titus Levy, "Human Rights Storytelling and Trauma Narrative in Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go", in Journal *of Human Rights*, vol. 10, nr. 1, p. 1.
7. Leland Person, *The Cambridge Introduction to Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 59.
8. Carol Marie Bensick, *La Nouvelle Beatrice. Renaissance and Romance in* Rappaccini's Daughter, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1985, p. x.
9. *Ibidem*, p. xii.
10. Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 11.
11. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses), in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.), *Monster Theory*, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 4
12. *Ibidem,* p. 7.
13. N. Hawthorne, *op. cit.,* p. 115.
14. *Ibidem,* p. 118.
15. Faye Ringel, "Genetic Experimentation: Mad Scientists and The Beast", in *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (5), 1989, p. 66.
16. *Ibidem*, p. 64.
17. N. Hawthorne, *op. cit.,* p. 133.
18. Glen Scott Allen, "Master Mechanics & Evil Wizards: Science and the American Imagination from Frankenstein to Sputnik", in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 1992, p. 518.
19. N. Hawthorne, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
20. S. Browner, *op. cit.*, p. 219.
21. Anna Brickhouse, "Hawthorne in the Americas: Frances Calderón de la Barca, Octavio Paz, and the Mexican Genealogy of *Rappaccini's Daughter*", in *PMLA*, vol. 113, nr. 2, 1998, p. 233.
22. *Ibidem.*
23. The fear of contamination and miscegenation can open up more discussions on the text from the perspective of racism, especially grounded in the mid-nineteenth century polemics on slavery, preceding the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. The mulatto was seen as a hybrid between two very different species, an unnatural character that produces the degeneration of the white race and the birth of a darker baby in a white family (not the other way around) was perceived as problematic (Werner Sollors, *"Neither black, nor white, yet both": Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 62-64). The racial supremacy of the white race in nineteenth century America and the fear of contamination is replicated in this short story in which Beatrice seems to contaminate Giovanni with her poison, transforming him into an inferior creature. Moreover, her beauty can be equated with a reality of those times, namely that of "passing", which allowed whiter individuals to "pass for" white and avoid racism and abuse. As Werner Sollors notes, passing is specific in situations of inequality between races (248). Beatrice "passes for" a human being, but, in reality, she is as poisonous and dangerous as her "sister" plants and she must be confined or eliminated from the world.
24. N. Hawthorne, *op. cit.,* p. 312.
25. Faye Ringel, *op. cit,* p. 74.
26. N. Hawthorne, *op. cit.*, p. 307.
27. *Ibidem,* p. 139.
28. M. D. Uroff, "The Doctors in *Rappaccini's Daughter*", in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1972, p. 68.
29. Algis Valiunas, "The Last Temptation of Science", in *The New Atlantis*, nr. 30, 2011, p. 123.
30. Anthony Cerulli and Sarah L. Berry (p. 120) connect the short story with the medical practices in Hawthorne's time as well as with elements from his life, more precisely his wife's debilitating migraines probably generated by her father, a doctor, having given her narcotics when she was teething. This led to a life-long experience of all sorts of experiments, more or less orthodox, to alleviate the pain.
31. *Ibidem*, p. 124.

32. N. Hawthorne, *op. cit.,* p. 138.
33. *Ibidem.*
34. *Ibidem,* p. 139.
35. Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go,* New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2005, p. 6.
36. Shameem Black, "Ishiguro's Inhuman Aesthetics", in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 4, 2009, p. 795.
37. Titus Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
38. Roberto del Valle Alcalá, "Servile Life: Subjectivity, Biopolitics, and the Labor of the Dividual in Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go", in *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 102, 2019, p. 38.
39. K. Ishiguro, *op.cit.,* p. 3.
40. R. del Valle Alcalá, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
41. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, New York, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 149.
42. Kelly Rich, "'Look in the Gutter': Infrastructural Interiority in *Never Let Me Go*", in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 4, 2015, p. 632.
43. T. Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
44. *Ibidem*, p. 2.
45. S. Black, *op. cit.,* p. 796.
46. T. Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
47. K. Ishiguro, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
48. Nathan Snaza, "The Failure of Humanizing Education in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*", in *Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol. 36, nr. 3, p. 220.
49. N. Hawthorne, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
50. K. Ishiguro, *op. cit.,* p. 241.
51. *Ibidem*, p. 260.
52. *Ibidem,* p. 261.
53. *Ibidem,* p. 254.
54. *Ibidem.*
55. T. Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
56. N. Snaza, *op. cit.*, p. 230.
57. K. Ishiguro, *op. cit.,* p. 336.
58. *Ibidem*, p. 346.
59. *Ibidem*, p. 347.
60. Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013, p. 2.