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Research Article

The Dynamics of Emotional and Ethical Interactions: Rethinking Subjectivity in Posthuman Conditions

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the subjectivity of clones in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and of dispensable individuals in Ninni Holmqvist's *The Unit* (2008) in a posthuman context. Despite their social exclusion, the protagonists in both novels demonstrate their relational and ethical capacities as forms of defiance. The paper particularly analyzes how Kathy, Ishiguro's protagonist, and Dorrit, Holmqvist's equivalent, resist the social systems that deny their full human status and affirm their selfhood through their emotional ties and moral responsiveness. While navigating societies that reduce them to expendables or biological objects, both protagonists employ relational and moral engagements as strategies to challenge their dehumanization. Previous scholarship has largely investigated biopolitical control, commodification of bodies, and marginalization of clones and dispensables in the novels, overlooking the emotional and ethical dynamics of these characters' lives. This paper addresses this gap, exploring the protagonists' capacities for friendship and love, empathy and care, art and memory, and their connection to nonhuman entities within worlds that treat them as disposable bodies. It incorporates the theoretical insights of posthumanism, propounded by Braidotti, Haraway, and Barad, emphasizing the concept of relational subjectivity. Using both primary and secondary sources, the paper adopts a qualitative research design and a critical analysis method. The findings of this paper highlight that subjectivity emerges not only from biological or social status but also from affective and creative capacities, and shared vulnerability, thereby reconceptualizing the expendables as emergent posthumans.

KEYWORDS: Subjectivity, posthumanism, clones, dispensables,

emotional and ethical relations

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary science fiction on human cloning and socially expendable humans challenges the conventional humanist notions that elevate the privileged humans as fully human while reducing other nonhumans and marginalized individuals to the status of mere biological objects. In this context, this paper argues that the clones in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and dispensables in Ninni Holmqvist's *The Unit* resist dehumanization and assert their posthuman subjectivity through affective and ethical relationships in societies that reduce them to biological resources used for medical experimentation and organ donations. For instance, Ishiguro's protagonist Kathy, a clone raised for organ donation, contests the regulated environments in Hailsham School and the Cottages by demonstrating her capacities for friendship, love, care, empathy, and connection to fellow clones and other nonhuman entities. Similarly, Holmoqvist's protagonist Dorrit, a woman deemed socially dispensable in a medically regulated Unit, forms emotional bonds in contrast to the system that commodifies her body as a mere organ-donating object. Her capacity for love, friendship, compassion, care, and concern for nonhuman entities—such as her dog, house, and nature—affirms her moral agency and selfhood, challenging the biopolitical control in the Unit. Both protagonists' memories and creative engagements, such as drawings, writing, dancing, and music, also reflect their relational dimensions. Together, the novels illustrate—through emotional and ethical engagements of clones and dispensables—that subjectivity and humanness emerge not from individuals' biological or social status, but from their capacity for affective interactions. The novels blur the boundaries of humanity by representing the clones and dispensables as individuals who can feel, relate, and care despite being reduced to objects. This paper employs the theoretical framework of posthumanism, propounded by Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Karen Barad, to analyze how the protagonists enact their posthuman subjectivity, developing capacities of affective entanglements. Posthumanism questions the traditional humanist assumption that equates subjectivity and moral agency exclusively with normative and privileged human identities and excludes non-human entities, clones, and other socially underprivileged groups as less than humans. It asserts the fluid subjectivity that emerges from interconnections and relationships. The paper utilizes this framework to analyze how the clones and dispensables uphold their ethical presence in societies that treat them as nonhumans. It explores how humanity is not a pre-determined trait, but something that emerges from relational entanglements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

After the publication, both narratives have received widely critical responses. Many Scholars have studied *Never Let Me Go* from various perspectives, from analyzing the clones' identity crisis to raising ethical questions. Carroll (2012) investigates the issue of identity and belonging of clones from a queer perspective. As she observes, the protagonists undergo "the 'queer' plight . . .: namely, that the discursive construction of the human clone as 'unnatural' and 'inhuman' is implicated in the imperatives of heteronormativity" (p. 131). Human society at large interprets the clones as abnormal beings, excluding them from full human personhood and identity. Similarly, Vichiensing (2017) investigates both the explicit and implicit ways of the "othering process" (p. 134). She studies how "the normals have been oppressing the clones since their early life until first to final donations and died in adulthood" (p. 134), pointing out how such othering results in oppression and the violation of the clones' value of life. Maleska (2019) raises ethical concerns that clones "have been created as a separate group to serve as a repository

of organs, and are therefore a class that politically, socially and genetically has been placed in a position of being underprivileged" (p. 137). Maleska examines how clones are forced to accept marginalization and reduced humanity. While Schneider (2018) analyzes the work as a bildungsroman, surveying the protagonist's "transition from childhood to adulthood, from innocence to experience and from sheltered inaction to agency and responsibility," (p. 29), he overlooks the affective dynamics driving this transformation. Sharma and Joshi (2025) also observe "that the clones' state of servitude and their position of donors showcase commodification of clones and the inhumanity of humanity . . . rais[ing] ethical and moral questions" (p. 47) about the achievement of medical science at the cost of clones' existence and identity. In a similar line, Vint (2021) argues, "Holmqvist shows us a culture fully willing to acknowledge the humanity of those it turns into a biological resource, thus diagnoses the economic logics by which productivity takes precedence over human rights" (p. 106). She argues that the novel critiques the reduction of humanity to a biological resource.

An extensive scholarly engagement has also responded to Holmqvist's *The Unit* from diverse critical lenses. In this connection, Wasson (2015) examines the novel's depiction of the exploitation of vulnerable individuals in societies influenced by biopolitical and economic forces (p. 105). From a slightly different angle, McCormack (2021) studies how the novel critiques gender equality policies: "*The Unit* is particularly important for its incisive critique of gender equality policies" (p. 166). He observes how state systems that claim to promote equality and social welfare institutionalize control over bodies. Roy et al. (2025) investigate how the novel depicts the human body as a commodified object within neoliberal biocapitalism. They conclude that the novel "foregrounds the rapid integration of human organs into neoliberal markets of global capitalism" (p. 101) by legally dividing people into different categories of worth and by deciding who deserves to live and who must die to save others through organ donations. Raisborough and Watkins (2021) scrutinize how this speculative novel engages with the future of ageing and age-related biopolitics, rendering "more implicitly negative in its vision of inescapable elderly dispensability in the future" (p. 32). In Liorsi's (2019) observation, the novel illustrates a society where the pursuit of a medical utopia leads to biological exploitation and forced medical treatment (p. 983). It traces how the dispensables' enforced self-sacrifice exposes the dystopian outcome of neoliberal society. Using a feminist perspective, Irr (2022) analyzes the novel as "a demodystopia to satirize a stagnant feminism" (p. 47) in which "adults without social relationships of care (relationships defined mainly, though not exclusively, by parenting) are required to report to a state-run facility at age fifty" (p. 47). This state-controlled feminism values only reproductive and caretaking-parenting roles, marginalizing older and childless women who do not conform to these roles.

Based on the reviewed literature, existing studies on both novels have largely focused on biopolitical control, commodified bodies, and oppressive social mechanisms, analyzing the clones and dispensables as marginalized individuals. Nevertheless, the characters' emotional and relational engagements as forms of silent resistance and parameters of their selfhood are rarely studied in the existing scholarship. This paper addresses the research gap by examining how affective and ethical engagements, such as love, friendship, empathy, attachment, care, and moral responsiveness, resist the biopolitical control and affirm their subjectivity in the posthuman contexts. Thus, it explores how the novels redefine humanity not as an attribute of privileged humans but as something that emerges through relational

interactions.

Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theoretical framework of posthumanism that informs the critical examination of the selected texts. It specifically emphasizes the notion of posthuman subjectivity as the conceptual framework. As contemporary literature increasingly engages with human/nonhuman boundary lines, posthumanism provides a lens that focuses on the shifting understandings of identity, agency, and subjectivity. Posthumanism redefines humanity by subverting the definition of a standard, fixed, or superior human. It questions the Cartesian-humanist model of "the standard human" as an autonomous, rational, self-contained subject: "The truth of the human, of what it means to be human, lies, that is to say, in the rational mind, or soul, which is entirely distinct from the body" (Badmington, 2003, p. 17). Posthumanism challenges the traditional human-centered perspectives and systems that grant subjectivity and agency to only "standard humans," excluding other nonhumans or subhumans who do not fit this category. In this light, the concept of posthuman subjectivity is grounded in the view that individuals' identities, selfhood, and actions are shaped by networks of relations, not by biology. By drawing on key propositions of Haraway, Braidotti, and Barad, this posthuman framework emphasizes that subjectivity is shared across even non-human actors through relational networks.

Haraway, Barad, and Braidotti question the humanist model of subjectivity as fixed and uniquely human quality. Instead, they emphasize the relational, emergent, and co-constitutive nature of selfhood. They assert that this posthuman subjectivity does not emerge from individuality or biological distinction, but from the network of relations with others, redefining what it means to be human. Haraway (2008) claims that beings do not exist fully isolated at first, but they come into being through their relations: "The partners do not precede their relating; all that is, is the fruit of becoming with" (p. 17). Subjectivity and identity are co-constitutive or "becoming with": "To be one is always to become with many" (Haraway, 2008, p. 4). One's selfhood is shaped through relations with others. Barad (2007) contends that entities do not exist independently and separately but through their intra-relationships: "To be entangled is . . . to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating" (p. ix). She states that entities preexist their relational entanglements but emerge through intra-actions. Her entities include both humans and nonhumans. Thus, identity and subjectivity are relationally co-constitutive and emergent. In line with Barad, Haraway asserts "the partners do not preexist their constitutive intra-action at every folded layer of time and space" (p. 32). Thus, subjectivities are formed through relations. Braidotti (2013) also reconceives subjectivity as relational, affirmative, and fluid. She views "subject as a relational process" (p. 41), outlining "the shift from unitary to nomadic subjectivity" (p. 49). She adds, "Posthuman subjectivity expresses an embodied and embedded and hence partial form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality, and hence community building . . . resting on the ethics of becoming" (p. 49). She claims that the self is a dynamic, embodied, and interconnected process shaped by relationships and shared vulnerability.

Postmodern subjectivity emerges from affective and ethical relations and interconnectedness with others. In this line, Seaman (2007) argues that "there has never been one unified, cohesive 'human' . . . endowed with reason and autonomous agency," emphasizing instead that subjectivity is in constant "mutation, variation and becoming" (p. 246–247),

a continual relational process through which posthuman subjects assert selfhood, agency, and value. Posthuman identities are constituted through relational bonds and interactions rather than social hierarchies or biological essentialism. Relational bonds are mostly shaped by emotional exchanges between entities. In this connection, Ahmed (2014) argues "how emotions work to shape the 'surfaces' of individuality and collective bodies" (p. 1). She asserts that emotional interactions are not just reactions and responses, but social practices that form connections among individuals.

Posthumanism interrogates the humanist ideology of subjectivity as fixed, autonomous, and uniquely human, and instead articulates the relational, emergent, and co-constitutive nature of selfhood extending even to nonhuman entities. Posthuman subjectivity is shaped by relations, showing that personhood is not inherent but produced through interactions. In the posthuman conditions, subjectivity becomes distributed rather than centralized. This distribution destabilizes the idea of the human as the sole locus of autonomy, and, instead, posits a networked subject—one whose selfhood emerges through connections. Thus, posthumanism offers a framework to analyze the clones and dispensables in the novels as affective and ethical posthuman subjects—beings whose emotions are not signs of weakness but assertions of relational and emergent subjectivity. The posthuman subjectivity emphasizes how subjectivity is imagined beyond humanist boundaries, and guides the subsequent textual analysis.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ISHIGURO'S *NEVER LET ME GO* AND HOLMQVIST'S *THE UNIT*

This section critically analyzes the ways Ishiguro's and Holmqvist's works destabilize the conventional notions of humanity, agency, and moral awareness. By examining the affective and ethical dynamics of the protagonists, the discussion elucidates how both novels uphold the subjectivity of the beings in the societies that label them as "clones" and "dispesnables," enforcing a human/nonhuman divide. Organ donors are identified as biological objects rather than recognized as moral persons. Deprived of personal choice, they are forced to internalize their instrumental roles, living under systems that control their bodies, emotions, and even thoughts. Under this biopolitical control, their "biological existence was reflected in political existence; the fact of living . . . passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention" (Foucault, 1978, p. 142). In such a condition, power does not become coercive but "tend[s] to render its actual exercise unnecessary" (Foucault, 1995, p. 201). This internalization of control—where subjects discipline themselves—marks the most effective form of oppression in the novels. In *Never Let Me Go*, Hailsham School and the Cottages normalize predetermined fates of clones, as Miss Lucy reminds the students: "Your lives are set out for you . . . you'll start to donate your vital organs" (p. 80). The students are already prepared for donating organs long before they actually have to. Similarly, in Holmqvist's *The Unit*, Dorrit endures constant surveillance—"picking your nose or poking about in your ears . . . having a pee or a shit" (pt. 2, ch. 5) in the Unit—and must negotiate a life where both life and death fall under regulation. Thus, the social systems reduce them to instruments of social or medical utility, imposing control and obedience through institutional confinement and psychological conditioning, regulated sexuality, and the medicalization of death. As "where there is power, there is resistance . . ." (Foucault, 1978, p. 95), the protagonists in both novels resist the biopower of dominating social systems through emotional and ethical engagements and reclaim their subjectivity in the posthuman conditions.

Emotional Dynamics of Kathy and Dorrit

Emotional connections sustain the personhood of clones and dispensables, resisting the systems of oppression and injustice in both novels. Emotional capacities, such as friendship, love, and empathy, reveal that subjectivity is relational and embodied rather than autonomous or predetermined. In this light, Braidotti (2013) conceptualizes posthuman subjectivity as arising from "an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others" (p. 48). She posits that posthuman subjectivity emerges from relational networks. The novels portray that Kathy and Dorrit's personhood grows out of their relational ties among their groups, as well as with other nonhuman entities such as animals, nature, and landscapes. Embodied and affective bonds do not appear merely as psychological responses, but as a medium through which Kathy and Dorrit assert their ethical presence in response to institutional domination. Through friendship, love, intimacy with nature, and art, the protagonists transform vulnerability into action. These relational networks act as central affective forces through which posthuman subjectivity becomes ethically visible in the clones and dispensables. In the works, these emotions manifest as embodied practices enacting moral agency.

In *Never Let Me Go*, clones reveal the capacities for love, bonding, and care. Kathy's recollection is never purely cognitive but deeply entwined with the emotions that shape her sense of self. Her memory of Tommy's drawings reflects a deep connection to him: "What I do remember is the strong mix of emotions that engulfed me at that moment" (p. 237). As an affective act, her memory merges with feeling to reconstruct moments of attachment, grounding her fragmented life in emotional continuity. Kathy recalls how Tommy's drawings are not just displays of artistic skill; they carry emotions, helping him stay connected despite a system that tries to erase him: "I realised immediately this was Tommy's way of putting behind us everything that had happened around his drawings back at the Cottages, and I felt relief, gratitude, sheer delight" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 237). Art becomes a source of comfort, joy, and pleasure, linking memory, affect, and care. In Kathy's memory, Tommy's artworks preserve shared emotion and hope, his act of 'showing he hadn't forgotten' linking art to feeling and ethical continuity (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 237). The clones demonstrate profound intimacy and love. Like normal humans, they "laugh, cry, squabble, reconcile, grow older and, ultimately, they fall in love" (p. 98). The intimacy between Kathy and Tommy deepens after Ruth's death, and Madame's refusal to their request for the deferral of their final donations. In the following scene, Kathy calms frustrated Tommy, sustaining their emotional bond:

> I reached for his flailing arms and held on tight. . . . I kept holding on, until he stopped shouting and I felt the fight go out of him. Then I realised he too had his arms around me. And so we stood together like that, at the top of that field, for what seemed like ages, not saying anything, just holding each other . . . to stop us being swept away into the night. (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 269)

Kathy and Tommy embrace in a moment of quiet intimacy and mutual support, calming each other and reaffirming their emotional bond amid fear and uncertainty. This scene reflects an affective bond of love and shared vulnerability, upholding their self-assertion in the backdrop of growing frustrations and desperation. Through this embodied engagement, the clones humanize themselves within a system that defines them as disposable organ donors. This scene affirms their affective agency, showing how subjectivity persists through embodied attachment even in unfriendly conditions.

In *The Unit*, Dorrit forges bonds of friendship and love with "dispensables," resisting the Unit's objectifying structures. She has very friendly relations with other residents. She has deep concerns for friends: "I'm here, Alice . . . Maybe I can help you . . . I hate—the thought of losing you" (Holmqvist, 2008, pt. 3, ch. 3). Dorrit and Johannes develop intimacy amid confinement: "So we made love, Johannes and I, we made love. . . . And the next evening and night, and the next, and the next—and so on. We simply became a couple. We became a loving couple" (pt. 2, ch. 12). Their physical intimacy transforms into a deeper emotional connection, functioning as a mode of quiet resistance. Their bond rejuvenates a sense of new identity and selfhood: "But he certainly didn't feel old. And I actually felt younger than I had for many years. Presumably it was because I was desired, and because I loved and was loved in return" (pt. 2, ch. 21). Their intimacy reflects that "the complex web of cognitive relations we develop and maintain with other[s] . . . determines our self" (Heersmink, 2017 p. 3135). In the novel, Dorrit's personhood grows stronger through her attachment to Johannes, defying the Unit's logic of her identity as a disposable body. Even after Johannes's clinical death, Dorrit maintains sensory and emotional connection: "I closed my eyes, caressed . . . the scent of his skin . . . I drew that scent into my body" (Holmqvist, 2008, pt. 2, ch. 24). These moments illustrate that moral awareness emerges through embodied bonds.

In both novels, the clones' and dispenasables' artistic engagement functions as a profound medium through which affective bonds are articulated. They have a close attachment with artworks, drawings, paintings, stories, music, and dance, which facilitate translating inner feelings—intimacy, love, hope, empathy, and grief—into embodied forms of connections. The artistic practices transform the protagonists' internal feelings into ethical expressions that resist oppression. In *Never Let Me Go*, the clones express feelings and emotions subdued in Hailsham through drawings and other creative acts. The artistic practices—for instance, Tommy's drawings, Kathy's recollections of the Gallery, and dance—reflect self-expression of their affective ties even within the controlled environments of surveillance. Despite authority uses "such artworks . . . to prepare them for lives of exploitation" (Black, 2009, p. 790), the clones engage in the works to express their relational bond and self. So, Kathy voices her quiet resistance when Madame takes their artworks away: "What is her gallery? She keeps coming here and taking away our best work. . . . Why should she have a gallery of things done by us?" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 30). By interrogating why Madame takes away their individual art creations, Kathy resists the Hailsham rule that erases the clones' individuality and personhood to satisfy the societies that receive their organs. Likewise, Kathy's secret dance with her favorite song, "Never Let Me Go," indicates her quiet defiance of the system's coldness. The song expresses the value of intimacy, connection, and fear of loss.

Even Madame secretly observes Kathy's obsession with the song in her dance: "You were dancing so sympathetically. And the music, the song. There was something in the words. It was full of sadness" (p. 266). Kathy's affective engagement with dance and music contrasts with Hailsham's unfeeling environment.

In Holmqvist's narrative, too, Dorrit's involvement with writing, music, and visual art reflects her emotional ties with fellow dispensables in the Unit. She uses her imagination and writing to reveal her feelings, express intimacy with the fellow dispensables, and cope with any adversity. In one instance, she hopes to get some peace through writing after the loss of Alice, one of her best friends: "I thought perhaps I might find some solace in the [writing] project" (Holmqvist, 2008, pt. 3, ch. 4). Writing offers her relief and

comfort in loneliness and feelings of loss. Dorrit's glance over Majken's painting of a deformed fetus stirs a deep contemplation on the value of life and ethics. Inspired by the painting, she writes a story about a woman giving birth to a severely deformed child: "I started a short story about a single woman around age forty-five who gives birth to a deformed child, not unlike the fetus in Majken's painting" (pt. 2, ch. 4). Through this story, Dorrit contemplates on empathy and emotional connection as the signposts of human value acknowledged beyond productivity. Her engagement with music also upholds relational and embodied connection with Johannes and her child: "It was a rock ballad. . . . He was holding me around the waist, I had one hand on his shoulder, the other in his hand" (pt. 2, ch. 9). She recalls another musical moment: "I only needed to hear the first two or three beats of the intro to recognize the ballad 'For My Girl'" (pt. 3, ch. 7), linking past and present to relational bonds. Music also mediates connection with her child: "[T]he music was loud now . . . [and] there was a movement inside me, a push or a kick. Automatically I pressed my hand against my stomach. . . . Let him say hello to his baby" (pt. 3, ch. 7). Her attachment to music articulates her intimacy to her child even in uncertainties.

Thus, Kathy engages in her deep love with Tommy, has friendly relations with Ruth and other clones, and uses art as the medium to convey self-expression and the importance of relational bonds. Similarly, Dorrit's love for Johannes, her relations with fellow dispesnables, and her creative engagements in writing, painting, music, and dance intensify her affective capacities despite the surveillance and control in the Unit. The protagonists resist the social mechanisms that oppress them through these silent mechanisms. Their emotional capacities in both novels do not remain personal or merely experiential but also generate ethical relationships—through care, empathy, and connection to other nonhuman entities—that, in turn, strengthen those capacities, thereby asserting their moral awareness.

The Ethical Dynamics of the Protagonists

In the novels, the protagonists assert selfhood through not only affective exchanges but also through ethical engagements. The clones' and dispensables' emotional bonds motivate acts of care, empathy, and attachment to nonhuman agents. They develop awareness of others' needs and feelings. Thus, emotional ties stimulate their ethical responsiveness towards others. The novels portray how the clones and dispensables practice care, empathy, solidarity, regret, and forgiveness, and concern for nature, animals, and home as forms of silent resistance in response to worlds that deny their ethical presence and subjectivity.

In Ishiguro's narrative, Kathy performs her primary role as a carer to the clones who have donated major organs and need care. However, she moves beyond the physical caregiving to emotional companionship with other clones in the Cottages. In line with how "care involves some form of ongoing connection" (Tronto, 1993, p. 105), Kathy transfers her caregiving to a capacity for emotional attachment to Ruth and Tommy. She recalls the moment when she takes care of Ruth: "I'd come in the evenings with biscuits and mineral water, and we'd sit side by at her window, watching the sun go down over the roots, talking about Hailsham, the Cottages, anything that drifted into our minds" (Ishiguro, 2005, 230). Kathy remembers how she takes care of Tommy before he completes after his final organ donation. Even if she is busy with other care receivers, she "still managed to come in three or four times a week" (p. 278). She not only offers physical care but also shares an affective bond with him. Kathy's nurturing role challenges the Cottages' clinical detachment. In this light, Noddings (1984) opines, "We find ourselves at the center of

concentric circles of caring. In the inner, intimate circle, we care because we love" (p. 46). Kathy cares for Tommy because they love each other. In *The Unit*, as Dorrit finds Johannes breathing—though clinically dead after the operation for the final donations—lying on the operating table, she touches the body and whispers in his ear: "Why? Why didn't you say anything? Why did you say you were happy? Why didn't you let me grieve with you?" (Holmqvist, pt. 2, ch. 24). She wishes he shared his feelings of pain and emotions with her so that they could face the tragedy and grieve together before he dies. Dorrit remembers how Johannes also takes care of her in many ways. This reflects that "care-giving involves the direct meeting of needs for care" (Tronto, 1993, p. 107). After Dorrit's operation for the kidney donation, Johannes offers his best care for her speedy recovery. As Dorrit recalls, "Johannes came to pick me up with flowers and a box of chocolates; he took me home and looked after me, cooked for me and served up my meals, made coffee and tea and fed me chocolates" (pt. 2, ch. 13). He tries his best to take care of her at that time. This implies that mutual caring strengthens the affective relationships between them.

Empathy also functions as a catalyst for affective bonds and ethical responsibility through which clones and dispensables assert their moral agency in the novels. Maibom (2007) states, "one must be aware that one is feeling what one is feeling because the other person is feeling what he is feeling or because of the situation he is in" (p. 2). Individuals should recognize their own feelings in relation to what others are feeling or the situation they are in. In both works, the protagonists' empathy demonstrates their ethical awareness. In *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy's empathy is evident: "Then I glanced at Ruth and got a real shock . . . All this effort, all this planning, just to upset my dearest friend" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 61), softening to say, "It's all right, I didn't see anything much" (p. 61). Her caregiving extends during Ruth's donation: "It was almost like a part of me had already made that decision, and Laura's words had simply pulled away a veil that had been covering it over" (p. 209). In *The Unit*, Dorrit's empathy for Elsa is clear: "You were right, Elsa. I am indeed waddling around looking smug and important" (Holmqvist. 2008, pt. 3, ch. 6), and her affective resonance surfaces in the fear of her final donation: "felt the anxiety stab down into my chest and squeeze it, hard" (pt. 3, ch. 6). Dorrit's empathy for Elsa illuminates her capacity for caring and bond, defying the Unit's logic of control and exploitation. In fact, she exemplifies how "emotional selves are recognized through empathic resonance" (Shaddox, 2013, p. 453). The self is acknowledged only when others recognize individuals' emotions through empathy. Through these empathetic acts, the protagonists sustain moral agency and relational connection, upholding selfhood even within systems that seek to dehumanize them.

In the works, the characters tend to repair their affective patches through ethical practices such as regret, apology, and forgiveness. In Ishiguro's narrative, the conflicting desires of Ruth, feelings of regret, and eventual reunion with Kathy and Tommy mark the clones' capacity for relational negotiation, forgiveness, and affective depth. Ruth confesses to her wrongdoing of separating Kathy and Tommy: "But I kept you [and Tommy] apart. I'm not asking you to forgive me. . . . What I want is for you to put it right" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 228). Kathy extends her forgiveness, replying, "It's okay . . . I'm going to become Tommy's carer" (p. 232) and offers to be the carer of Tommy after Ruth's completion in the final organ donation. Kathy's nurturing role as a "carer" illustrates her affective investment in others' well-being, not as an obligation but as an expression of relational agency. Relational emotions like jealousy and regret, such as Kathy confronting Ruth over Tommy (p. 122), act as catalysts for ethical engagement. Forgiveness, as when Tommy

apologizes for hurting Kathy through tantrums—"I'm really, really sorry" (p. 13)—reinforces relational responsibility and the bond between the two. In *The Unit*, too, Dorrit's relationships with residents like Elsa highlight the negotiation of care, loyalty, and trust even in the adverse environment. She offers help to the new residents: "If there's anything you're not sure about . . . then I'm here" (pt. 2, ch. 9), and affirms commitment despite personal challenges: "My friends meant a great deal to me" and "I am not the kind of person who breaks promises . . . or betrays a trust" (pt. 3, ch. 6). These moments illuminate Dorrit's ethical responsibilities, asserting her humanity and moral presence in a world designed to use her body as a commodity. Hence, both Kathy and Dorrit enact their ethical relationships in the forms of care and empathy and compassion, and forgiveness. They also extend their relationship to include other non-human entities such as animals, gardens, landscapes, and houses.

Extending Care and Connection to Other Nonhuman Entities

Both novels extend the levels of clones-to-clones and dispensables-to-dipensables relationships to the protagonists' ethical connections to animals and natural entities as nonhuman agents, such as the animals, gardens, land, and house. Their attachments counter the oppressive systems that reduce them to biological utility. In *Never Let Me Go*, the clones' attachment to Norfolk acts as a repository of affective connections. Kathy's concern for Norfolk—a frequently visited place where lost items are found—implies a deeper meaning in Kathy's life. This place not only shapes her selfhood and memory but also symbolizes her hope for something good. It reflects her emotional struggle for agency in an unfeeling world of Hailsham. Kathy's retrospection on her visit to the place reveals the memory of Hailsham days: "Even then, it was mainly a nostalgia thing, and today, if I happen to get the tape out and look at it, it brings back memories of that afternoon in Norfolk every bit as much as it does our Hailsham days" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 171). Kathy's visit to Norfolk reminds her of the Hailsham days. It illuminates the clones' experience of affective bonds and shared vulnerability despite the system's control. It generates a sense of self and cultivates hope in Kathy. In *The Unit*, Dorrit narrates her close attachment to her dog, Jock, her house, and gardens before she is kept in the Unit, signifying her sense of belonging and deep connections to nonhuman agents. Through this memory, she preserves her affective and ethical integrity extending beyond humans. For instance, she responds to the Unit's inhuman atmosphere, recalling her embodied tie with the dog. Dorrit recalls how she and her dog "lived side by side by side, body to body, without promises, lies or small talk" (Holmqvist, 2008, pt. 2, ch.1). This moment captures the reciprocal and affective bond between Dorrit "locates in the image of the child some of the same elements that she associates with her dog" (Irr, 2022, p. 47). She hardly finds any difference between her child and the dog and offers her care to both equally. This unmediated and embodied bond in which "the dog exemplifies a unified life for Dorrit (p. 47) functions as a strategy of Kathy's defiance of the confinement. As Haraway (2008) claims, "Companion species are figures of a relational ontology" (p. 307). The companionate relationship between the narrator and the dog challenges the institutional erasure of Dorrit's agency.

Both novels use memory as a central narrative device that reflects the affective and ethical relationships the clones and dispensables demonstrate. The protagonists' memory of the past reveals their self-continuity even within dominant structures of control. Memory plays a central role in "identity formation" (Assmann, 2011, p. 9-10), "linking past and present actions, sustaining continuity, and enabling the self to function as a coherent, morally responsible agent" (Burge, 2003, p. 328). Likewise,

Booth (2008) links memory to morality along with individual identity, highlighting "the relationship between memory-identity on the one side and morality on the other side" (p. 245). Through memory, Kathy and Dorrit recall their emotional and ethical ties with fellow clones and dispensables. In *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy draws on her retrospection: "The memories I value most, I don't see them ever fading. I lost Ruth, then I lost Tommy, but I won't lose my memories of them" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 280). Her memories about Hailsham life and the Cottages days reflect the true values of friendship and attachment. They are not simple acts of remembering past relationships, but a locus of asserting selfhood against their dehumanization. In *The Unit*, Dorrit's memory of house reasserts self and sense of belonging: "Yes, I did actually have a house . . . my very own home, my sanctuary, a place over which I and no one else had control, where my dog could run free and I could walk in peace most of the time" (Holmqvist, pt. 2, ch. 2). Dorrit asserts her sense of belonging and challenges the Unit's confinement through memory. Heersmink (2017) claims that "memory is often distributed and . . . the self is partly constituted by our memory" (p. 3136). In this light, Dorrit's distributed memory reflects her attachment to home, family, and the dog as well as her love for Johannes and the unborn child. Thus, Kathy's and Dorrit's subjectivity is also constituted by their memory, along with their artistic engagements, affective bonds, and ethical relationships with fellow clones and dispensables.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, both *Never Let Me Go* and *The Unit* illustrate how the clones' and dispensables' posthuman subjectivity emerges through the emotional relationships and ethical practices despite the systems of institutional control. Kathy and Dorrit assert selfhood and moral agency through affective and ethical engagements such as friendship, love, intimacy, creative activities, care, apology, and forgiveness, empathy, and attachment to nonhuman entities like home, animals, and landscapes. The protagonists affirm their humanity through relational dynamics, contesting systems of oppression at Hailsham, the Cottages, and the Unit. The paper employs the theoretical frameworks of posthumanism and the conceptual framework of posthuman subjectivity. The findings conclude that posthuman subjectivity emerges from relational networks, rather than biological or social status. The protagonists enact posthuman subjectivity through the affective acts of love, friendship, and intimacy, and the ethical acts of care, empathy, and concern for nonhuman entities. Thus, even entities considered nonhuman—such as clones and dispensables—reveal their humanness through emotional and ethical acts, thereby blurring the traditional boundaries of humanity. Despite the systemic dehumanization, the protagonists exhibit their humanness in the posthuman conditions. The implications of this research extend far beyond the literary analysis, raising serious ethical questions about the impact of genetic engineering, biotechnology, and the medicalization of life, as well as the marginalization of certain groups and lives. Future scholarship could explore posthuman subjectivity in other speculative and dystopian works, considering intersections with other factors such as gender, age, and culture.

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