

Identity as Simulacrum in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* L'identité Comme Simulacre dans *Never Let Me Go* de Kazuo Ishiguro

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Abstract:

This article examines how Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* constructs the identity of its cloned protagonists through Jean Baudrillard's orders of simulacra. Applying Baudrillard's typology, the study argues that Kathy H.'s narration evolves from representation to hyperreality. Her memoir shifts from documenting experience to reconstructing memory as a means of self-creation. The analysis shows that identity in the novel emerges discursively rather than from biological or historical origins. By applying simulation theory, the study reveals how the novel enacts the erosion of authenticity central to postmodern subjectivity.

Keywords: Baudrillard ; simulation ; postmodernism; identity; Ishiguro.

Résumé :

Cet article analyse comment *Never Let Me Go* de Kazuo Ishiguro construit l'identité de ses clones selon les ordres de simulacres de Jean Baudrillard. La narration de Kathy H. évolue de la représentation vers l'hyperréalité, son récit transformant l'expérience en mémoire reconstruite.

L'identité y naît d'un processus discursif plutôt que biologique, révélant, à travers la théorie de la simulation, l'effacement de l'authenticité propre à la subjectivité postmoderne.

Mots-clés : Baudrillard ; simulation ; postmodernisme ; identité ; Ishiguro.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005), later adapted into a film in 2010, and occupies an important position in contemporary British literature and studies of postmodern narrative. The novel presents a dystopian society, in which human clones are raised specifically for organ donation, raising urgent ethical, existential, and biopolitical questions. Scholars have explored how Ishiguro interrogates memory, identity, and emotional labor, revealing the limitations of conventional understandings of subjectivity (Li, 2023; Zhao, 2024). Unlike traditional bildungsroman narratives, the novel explores the possibility of selfhood when biological or social origins are manufactured rather than naturally given, portraying identity as contingent, performative, and mediated.

This study focuses on the problem of identity formation under conditions where origin is absent or artificially constructed. The clones' subjectivities do not emerge organically or through familial inheritance; they are shaped instead by shared memory, narrative practices, and institutional agendas. Such a configuration prompts fundamental questions about the nature of identity and the ethics of life within technologically mediated regimes.

Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra offers a useful framework for this analysis. His four orders namely faithful reflection, perversion or masking, masking the absence of reality, and pure simulation or hyperreality, illustrate how signs progressively detach from referential reality, Hence forming a self-sustaining system in which representation becomes autonomous (Glattfelder, 2019; Newbery et al., 2021). Applied to literary analysis, these orders allow for a detailed examination of how narratives construct subjectivity independently of biological or historical truth, offering a postmodern lens on autobiography, memory, and identity (Purwanti, 2019; Kuznetsova et al., 2015).

The present study poses the following question: how does Kathy H.'s narrative structure reflect the progression of Baudrillard's four orders of simulacra, and in what ways does this process redefine autobiographical identity in postmodern fiction? It hypothesizes that Kathy's memoir operates as a hyperreal construction, in which identity is progressively constituted through recollection,

testimony, and institutional mediation, rather than through any biological or historical referent.

This research is limited to the novel itself, excluding the film adaptation, and utilizes a critical-theoretical textual analysis. By situating Baudrillard's simulacra within Ishiguro's narrative strategies, the study examines how postmodern fiction can produce subjectivity without authentic origin, challenging traditional paradigms of autobiographical authority and human selfhood.

This study uses a qualitative textual analysis grounded in poststructuralist semiotics, emphasizing the interpretive relationship between narrative discourse and theoretical abstraction. The method prioritizes close reading to explore how signs, language, and narrative structures generate meaning independently of empirical or referential reality. In this framework, *Never Let Me Go* is treated not as a reflection of the real world, but as a discursive construct in which questions of identity, authenticity, and simulation are enacted.

Poststructuralist semiotics is particularly appropriate for this study because Ishiguro's novel deliberately destabilizes meaning through temporal disjunctions, unreliable narration, and the play of memory and identity. The analysis is critical-theoretical and interpretive rather than empirical, involving no quantitative measurement or historical reconstruction. The novel itself constitutes the primary corpus and is approached as a site where theoretical concepts, specifically Baudrillard's four orders of simulacra, can be examined, illustrated, and extended.

This study interprets *Never Let Me Go* by tracing how each order of simulacra—drawn from poststructuralist semiotic theory—is embedded in Kathy H.'s recollections and narrative voice. Beginning with the illusion of transparency and reliability often associated with memoir (first-order simulacra), the narrative gradually incorporates techniques such as euphemistic language, institutional discourse, and delayed revelation to mask underlying truths (second-order). It then moves toward the fabrication of identity and the idea of a "soul" as compensatory fictions (third-order), culminating in a mode where memory, storytelling, and self-narration become self-contained systems of meaning, untethered from any stable origin (fourth-order). Through close textual analysis, the study shows how Ishiguro's narrative shifts from representation to simulation, presenting identity

not as something grounded in biology or history, but as a self-sustaining construct formed entirely through language and narrative.

2. Literature Review

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* has been widely discussed for the way it quietly unpacks what it means to be human in a world shaped by technology, control, and loss. Rather than focusing only on the ethics of cloning, many critics explore how the novel challenges fixed ideas of identity and humanity. Through Kathy H.'s memories and relationships, Ishiguro shows how consciousness and selfhood are shaped by the systems around us—whether through institutions, language, or emotional bonds. This review brings together a range of critical views that read the novel not just as a dystopian story, but as a deeper reflection on how identity is formed, constrained, and sometimes quietly resisted within structures of power.

Several critics interpret Ishiguro's narrative through the dual lens of humanism and the political dimensions of technological systems such as posthumanism. This points to the limitations in the belief in a fixed human essence, showing identity and consciousness as outcomes of relations with system of control and technology, not inherent traits. This shifts the focus from the ethical implications of cloning to its ontological and systemic ramifications, thereby positing the clones' existence as a catalyst for redefining what it means to be a human. This view is exemplified by NatawanWongchalard, in *Memory and Posthuman Subjectivity in Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go*(2025), who interprets Kathy H.'s narrative not as passive reminiscence but as an active process of "becoming". The process of self-identification then becomes a means of reclaiming agency within a system engineered for the erasure of individuality (17). From this perspective, the clones like Kathy H. are understood not as mere victims of exploitation but as subjects whose identity and consciousness are relational and emergent, reflecting a posthuman model of subjectivity.

Ishiguro challenges the traditional view of humanist essentialism by portraying characters whose identities are constructed through relational processes or as Pritam Panda and Panchali Bhattacharya, in "Exploring the Humane in the Posthuman: A Critical Analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's Transhumanist Narratives"

(2024) put it, the human qualities of the clones are contingent emerging through interactions, social relations, and systems of control rather than existing as innate properties of a human essence (132). This exemplified through their interactions with one another, through education, and through their capacity for care and emotional connection, they display characteristics conventionally associated with humanity. Their sense of identity, affection, and moral reflection thus emerges relationally, not naturally.

Another critical approach foregrounds the operation of biopolitics within Ishiguro's fictional world. Biopolitics interrogates how power extends into the domain of life itself through institutional mechanisms that regulate bodies, reproduction, and mortality, thereby transforming existence into an object of political and economic management. Critics such as Santi Ranjan Sing, in "'We're Modelled from Trash': Confronting Transhumanism and Critical Posthumanism in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" (*New Literaria*, 2021), identify the clones' condition as a biopolitical concern. He argues that the loss of human distinctiveness does not yield liberation but rather reinforces commodification in which "transhumanistic features" become the very attributes that define the clones' exchange value within a biopolitical system (151).

Kai Yan, on the other hand, in "Posthuman Biopredicament: A Study of Biodystopia in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" (2019), further highlights the biopolitical dimension by examining how the novel exposes tensions between scientific advancement and ethical governance, demonstrating that politicized science produces enduring dilemmas concerning the value of life and the ethics of experimentation (597). Collectively, these critical readings frame Ishiguro's narrative as a study of subjectivity negotiated under systems of control, illustrating how increasingly the category of the human becomes unstable in the face of biopolitical influence.

Likewise, another strand of criticism draws heavily on Foucauldian concepts of power, specifically the modern modality of power that operates through management and regulation. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault outlines the axiom of modern sovereignty as a power that functions by "making live and letting die," a logic that finds stark literalization in the clones' predetermined trajectory from education to "donation" (138). Within this framework,

institutional control emerges as insidiously comprehensive, demonstrating how establishments such as Hailsham operate as “regimes of truth,” deploying euphemistic terminology—“completion,” “carer,” “donation”—that both conceals exploitation and constrains the possibility of resistance.

Roberto Del Valle Alcalá, in his article “Servile Life: Subjectivity, Biopolitics, and the Labor of the Dividual in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*” (2019), introduces the notion of “servile life” to conceptualize the biopolitical formation of subjects who internalize their own exploitation as part of the natural order (42). His use of the “dividual” effectively captures the clones’ fragmented consciousness, simultaneously aware of and submissive to their oppression (40). The system’s efficacy is further evidenced in Kathy’s narrative voice; Emily Johansen, in “Bureaucracy and Narrative Possibilities in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*” (2016), argues that her bureaucratic politeness, emotional restraint, and adoption of institutional jargon exemplify how administrative discourse produces a compliant subjectivity (9). Collectively, these studies reveal a form of a power structure that operates not through overt coercion but through normalization, linguistic containment, and the internalization of subjugation.

Other critics adopt a psychoanalytic perspective, examining trauma and identity as the terrains upon which the struggle for selfhood is waged in *Never Let Me Go*. Kathy H.’s account is thus interpreted as both a symptom of systemic trauma and a strategic, albeit fraught, response to it. J. Waham, in “The Exploration of Trauma and Memory” (2023), exemplifies this approach, showing how memory functions to “both reveal and conceal the past,” a process continually mediated by psychological defense mechanisms (16). Consequently, memory emerges not as a static archival record but as an active and contested site of negotiation. From this perspective, Kathy’s narrative operates as a dialectical instrument that archives systemic violence, positioning memory as central to both subjugation and resistance.

Deepa and Tyagi argue in “Identity Crisis in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*” (2021) that the clones experience a perpetual identity crisis, unable to achieve a socially recognized selfhood, as they remain “consumed with questions about themselves and their place in the world” due to structural exclusion (Deepa and Tyagi 193). Their futile pursuit of “possibles” underscores the impossibility

of constructing a coherent identity without origins or societal acknowledgment. Psychoanalytic criticism further highlights the clones' attempts to construct alternative identities through art and social bonds; however, M. Inbaraj, in *Memory and Nostalgia in Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go: A Psychoanalytical Study* (2019), demonstrates that these surrogate practices remain insufficient, confirming that identity depends not only on individual psychology but also on external recognition (510). Thus, *Never Let Me Go* critiques not merely the cloning apparatus but the broader social structures that condition personhood on arbitrary and exclusionary criteria.

In the end, *Never Let Me Go* offers more than a bleak warning about scientific overreach which becomes a deeply personal meditation on identity, memory, and what it means to be seen as human. Through the lives of the clones, Ishiguro quietly exposes how systems of power shape not only bodies but also minds and relationships. The critics discussed here highlight how the novel resists simple answers, instead asking us to reconsider where humanity begins and how it's defined. Whether through posthumanism, biopolitics, or personal trauma, these perspectives reveal the quiet tragedy at the heart of the story: that the search for selfhood is as much about connection and recognition as it is about biology or origin. Ishiguro's narrative lingers because it shows how fragile, and how deeply constructed, our sense of humanity really is.

2. Theoretical Framework

Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra offers a vital framework for examining the evolving relationship between representation and reality in contemporary culture. Developed in the late twentieth century within poststructuralist and postmodern thought, Baudrillard's work responds to a cultural moment in which media, technology, and institutional systems increasingly mediate experience, challenging the assumption that signs faithfully correspond to a tangible reality. Simulacra, as Glattfelder argues, represent the final stage in a four-step progression of signs, moving from faithful reflection to a state in which signs "bear no relation to reality anymore" and "become a reality in their own right". This progression, he adds, captures the shift from traditional representation toward what he termed hyperreality: "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (2019, p. 501).

Baudrillard reconfigures the notion of representation itself. As Purwanti contends that while conventional representation assumes a direct correspondence between a sign and the reality it denotes, simulation produces “another appearance as reality”. This distinction is particularly relevant for literary analysis, where narratives may operate beyond mimesis to construct alternative realities. Purwanti adds that in simulated worlds, “the difference between real and fantasy, between original and fake are very slim,” creating spaces where “real and imaginary become unclear” (2019, p. 43).

Baudrillard identifies four successive orders of simulacra, each reflecting a progressively greater detachment from underlying reality:

- a) **Faithful Reflection:** The initial stage presents the sign as a clear and accurate reflection of reality. It functions as “a faithful and transparent representation” of a deeper truth (Newbery et al., 2021, p. 1; Kamayanti, 2011, p. 11), maintaining a direct correspondence with its referent (Nikola, 2019, p. 260).
- b) **Perversion/Masking:** At this stage, representation begins to distort reality. The simulacrum “masks and perverts a basic reality,” producing a “distorted or twisted image, which deprives reality of its deep-seated quality” (Kamayanti, 2011, p. 11). Signs no longer simply reflect reality; they manipulate and obscure it (López et al., 2013, p. 80).
- c) **Masking the Absence of Reality:** Here, the simulacrum no longer relies on a preexisting reality. Instead, it “masks the absence of any fundamental reality,” simulating the appearance of reality even where none exists (López et al., 2013, p. 80; Kamayanti, 2011). Signs conceal the lack of a foundation rather than merely distorting an existing truth (Nikola, 2019, p. 260).
- d) **Pure Simulacrum (Hyperreality):** In the final stage, the sign is completely detached from reality. It “bears no relation to any reality” and constitutes “a pure simulacrum or hyper-reality” (Newbery et al., 2021, p. 9). The sign precedes reality and exists independently, creating self-contained worlds with no necessary connection to the external world (Kamayanti, 2011, p. 11; Kuznetsova et al., 2015, p. 5).

This framework emphasizes the erosion of the hierarchy between sign and referent. As one progresses through the four orders, “the separation between the real and the simulation becomes even more blurry... until the final and fourth level when the simulation becomes indistinguishable from the real” (Patra et al., 2016, p. 138). Applied to literary texts, this model provides a lens for analyzing works in which identity, memory, and narrative are mediated through layers of representation rather than grounded in empirical reality.

While highly productive, Baudrillard’s model is not without limitations. It tends to abstract simulation from affective or ethical dimensions, which are central to human experience. In literary texts such as Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, characters’ emotions, moral awareness, and relational attachments persist even within hyperreal constructs. Recognizing this, the present study applies Baudrillard’s typology reflexively, mapping the four orders of simulacra onto Kathy H.’s narrative while attending to the persistent emotional and ethical residues that complicate a purely structural reading. This approach allows for a nuanced analysis of how Kathy’s memoir moves from ostensibly mimetic recollection to autonomous, hyperreal construction of selfhood, while also acknowledging the affective depth that emerges within simulation.

3. Kathy H.’s Memoir Voice and the First Order of Simulation

The First Order of Simulation suggests that a sign functions as a direct and unmediated reflection of reality, adhering to a principle of faithful representation in which the narrative maintains correspondence with its referent. In *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy H.’s memoir voice exemplifies this order, presenting itself as a transparent and reliable account of past events (Ishiguro, 77). Her narrative gives the impression of honesty and authority, striving for the clarity expected of a faithful memoir. She achieves this effect through several techniques: establishing narrative authority, grounding recollections in concrete detail, emphasizing the conscientiousness of memory, and cultivating a conversational tone that engages the reader directly. These strategies collectively sustain the illusion that her story functions as an accurate reflection of lived experience.

From the opening paragraphs, Kathy consciously constructs her credibility as a mature and experienced narrator. She introduces herself with her name, age,

and professional background: “My name is Kathy H. I’m thirty-one years old, and I’ve been a carer now for over eleven years” (Ishiguro, 1). She reinforces this authority by highlighting her expertise with donors: they “always tended to do much better than expected” and she has “developed a kind of instinct around donors” (Ishiguro, 1). This professional framing situates her voice not merely as subjective memory but as grounded, observational expertise, lending credibility to her narrative world. Furthermore, she explicitly states her purpose: nearing the end of her career, she feels an “urge to order all these old memories” (Ishiguro, 77), reassuring readers that her memoir is a deliberate attempt to organize recollections, reinforcing its appearance as a faithful record.

To create the impression of tangible reality, Kathy saturates her recollections with sensory and material details. She evokes the “view from the Art Room over the fields on a foggy morning” (Ishiguro, 6) and describes the Portway Studios with attention to color and texture—the “peppermint” walls and the “rotten piece from a boat stuck up high” (Ishiguro, 346). Characters are equally vividly rendered: Miss Lucy is remembered as a “squat, almost bulldoggy figure, and her odd black hair” (Ishiguro, 51). Objects, too, anchor memory, as in her description of a treasured Judy Bridgewater cassette case, with its “purple satin dress,” “barstool,” “palms behind her,” and “cigarette burning in her hand” (Ishiguro, 148). These precise details lend material weight to her recollections, reinforcing the impression that her narrative reproduces lived experience faithfully.

Paradoxically, Kathy’s acknowledgment of memory’s fallibility strengthens her credibility. By admitting potential errors, she signals conscientiousness rather than unreliability. She notes temporal distance—“This was all a long time ago so I might have some of it wrong” (Ishiguro, 21)—and questions her own emotional responses, as when reconsidering her reaction to Tommy’s humiliation: “Or maybe I’m remembering it wrong. Maybe even then... maybe I did feel a little stab of pain” (Ishiguro, 11). She cross-checks details with others, such as the date of the “tokens controversy”: “I said we’d been ten at the time; he thought it was later, but in the end came round to agreeing with me. I’m pretty sure I got it right” (Ishiguro, 79). Consulting friends to construct “a more or less full account” of Tommy’s problems (Ishiguro, 26) further demonstrates her carefulness, enhancing the impression of accuracy.

Finally, Kathy reinforces the sense of transparency through a conversational narrative style that directly addresses the reader: “I’m sure you’ve heard it plenty more” (Ishiguro, 2), “I don’t know how it was where you were” (Ishiguro, 22). This rhetorical approach establishes intimacy, positioning the reader as confidant and encouraging acceptance of her voice as truthful. In this context, the memoir functions less as fiction than as testimony, a record offered in the spirit of honesty and trust.

Taken together, these strategies—establishing authority, providing sensory detail, demonstrating conscientious memory, and cultivating conversational intimacy—show how Kathy’s narrative aligns with the First Order of Simulation. Her memoir preserves the appearance of an unmediated reflection of reality, persuading readers to treat her account as a faithful record, even as it remains shaped by the instabilities of memory and the inherent constructedness of narrative.

4. Students’ Identities as Fabrications; Hailsham’s Art Project as Proof of “souls

In Jean Baudrillard’s framework, the **Second Order of Simulation** arises when signs no longer function as transparent reflections of reality but instead distort or conceal it. In Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, this second order is enacted through a triad of strategies: the euphemistic vocabulary that conceals the truth of the clones’ condition, the institutional digressions that misdirect their attention, and the narrative delays that reproduce avoidance mechanisms within Kathy’s retrospective narration. These forms of masking culminate in Miss Emily’s final admission that the entire project of Hailsham depended on deception.

The harsh facts of organ harvesting and premature death are persistently re-coded into a sanitized lexicon. Kathy identifies herself as a “carer” who looks after “donors,” emphasizing that her patients “always tended to do much better than expected” and that hardly any were considered “agitated,” even before their “fourth donation” (Ishiguro 3, 4). Such professionalized labels obscure the reality of clones as medical subjects, replacing terms like “organ bank” or “clone” with neutral social roles. The euphemism for death, “completing,” functions similarly. Kathy recalls that one donor “must have known he wasn’t going to make it” after

his third operation, delicately describing his death as completing (Ishiguro 277). Ruth reinforces this normalized vocabulary when she remarks that completing is “what we’re supposed to be doing, isn’t it?” (Ishiguro 279). Even the language of identity is strategically softened: students are repeatedly told they are “special” and addressed as “students.” Miss Emily later admits this was part of a rhetorical strategy to elevate their status beyond being seen merely as “shadowy objects in test tubes” (Ishiguro 261). Euphemism thus works as a systemic mask, softening brutality into professional normalcy.

Hailsham’s institutional design ensured that existential truths were consistently diverted into activities that obscured their ultimate purpose. Central to this masking was the collection of art. The students believed Madame’s mysterious “Gallery” (Ishiguro 32) preserved their most valued work for cultural or aesthetic reasons. In reality, Miss Emily reveals that the collection’s function was to “demonstrate to the world” that clones, if nurtured humanely, could be “as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being” (Ishiguro 261). The Gallery’s true role was to provide proof of “souls” (Ishiguro 261). Tommy’s theory that art was used to judge the sincerity of couples seeking deferrals—based on Miss Emily’s claim that art “revealed your soul” (Ishiguro 173)—illustrates how even within the students’ understanding, creativity was displaced from self-expression into institutional evidence.

A further example of institutional misdirection lies in sex education. Kathy observes that the guardians deliberately used lessons about sex to “smuggle into our heads a lot of the basic facts about our futures” (Ishiguro 93). Miss Emily, for instance, combines instruction with a skeleton with warnings that students, unlike “normal people outside,” “couldn’t have babies” and had to avoid disease to protect their donor functions (Ishiguro 94). By embedding mortality and infertility within the embarrassment of sexual education, the guardians ensured that existential truths were muted by adolescent distraction.

The novel’s structure itself reproduces the Second Order of Simulation through Kathy’s retrospective narration, which is marked by digressions and self-conscious delays. These narrative strategies mirror the avoidance culture

cultivated at Hailsham, where students were “told and not told” (Ishiguro 81). When Miss Lucy warns them that smoking is “much, much worse” for them, the students refrain from asking why. Kathy later explains that they avoided the question because it “embarrassed us” and made the guardians “awkward whenever we came near this territory” (Ishiguro 86–87). Similarly, the recurring “unzipping” joke about bodies opening like bags becomes a communal tactic for acknowledging donations while avoiding serious confrontation (Ishiguro 85).

Delays also manifest in symbolic geographies. Norfolk, mythologized as England’s “lost corner, where all the lost property found in the country ended up” (Ishiguro 66), offers students the “comfort” of imagining retrieval, masking the irretrievability of their own futures (Ishiguro 67). This mythology, coupled with sentimental digressions like the search for Kathy’s Judy Bridgewater tape, transforms moments of existential urgency into nostalgic detours.

The systematic nature of this masking is confirmed in Miss Emily’s final confession. She explains that Miss Lucy was dismissed precisely because her truth-telling threatened Hailsham’s protective illusions. “We were able to give you something ... and we were able to do that principally by sheltering you” (Ishiguro 266). She admits directly that the guardians “kept things from you, lied to you, fooled you” (Ishiguro 266). This strategy of “shelter” was essential: without it, students would have dismissed their art and lessons as futile in light of their inevitable “completion” (Ishiguro 277).

In *Never Let Me Go*, the Second Order of Simulation operates not as a distant theoretical construct but as the very grammar of the clones’ lives. Euphemisms transform brutality into normalcy, institutional digressions divert attention into art and sex, and narrative delays structure both memory and self-representation. The final revelation that this entire system was built on deliberate deception confirms that Ishiguro’s narrative dramatizes the mechanics of Baudrillard’s theory: a reality in which truth is neither absent nor present but continuously masked, “told and not told” (Ishiguro 81).

5. Masking Absence: Fabricated Identity and the Third Order of Simulation

The narrative world in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* exemplifies the Third Order of Simulation, a stage in which models of reality actively precede and

mask the absence of any true origin or foundational truth. For Kathy H. and her peers, this process is essential: since their biological identities are mass-produced and designed solely for utilitarian purposes, the Hailsham institution must fabricate a fundamental, humane identity—a soul—to obscure the brutal void of their genesis. Their roles as students, artists, and sensitive young people are carefully constructed simulations intended to conceal the absence of a natural human origin, epitomized by the art project designed as “proof of soul” (Ishiguro, 371).

The necessity of this fabrication stems from the students’ true function, which is strictly instrumental and devoid of intrinsic human value. Miss Lucy explicitly reveals that the students were created to provide “vital organs” (Ishiguro, 177), and Miss Emily confirms that, prior to Hailsham’s reform, clones—or “students, as we preferred to call you”—were treated merely as “Shadowy objects in test tubes” (Ishiguro, 555). This origin story offers no foundation for selfhood, humanity, or a future beyond eventual “completion” (Ishiguro, 479). To counteract this absence, the simulation invents a history and core humanity. Hailsham’s premise was to give students something invaluable—“your childhoods” and shelter—so that “no one will ever take [them] from you” (Ishiguro, 557). This protection was necessary because direct confrontation with their lack of natural origin would destabilize their constructed identities and render their lessons “pointless” (Ishiguro, 557).

Central to this simulation is the emphasis on creativity and art, managed through Madame’s mysterious Gallery. Students are led to believe that their artistic output is a direct measure of their worth and social significance (Ishiguro, 28). Tommy recounts Miss Emily’s explanation that their work “revealed what you were like inside” and “revealed your soul” (Ishiguro, 367). The concept of the soul—the non-replicable essence conferring intrinsic value—serves as the invented origin that masks their manufactured existence. Art thus functions not as aesthetic achievement but as tangible evidence of simulated humanity. Miss Emily confirms this: the art was gathered to “demonstrate 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” (Ishiguro, 545). These exhibitions became political tools in the fight against those who considered clones “less than human” (Ishiguro, 544–545). In this way, the Gallery

operates as a hyperreal archive: a collection of simulations (the artworks) designed to prove the existence of a essential internal origin that was intentionally omitted at creation.

The simulation achieves its intended effect through the students' mental and emotional engagement. Kathy remarks that the structure of Hailsham ensured they remained "absorbed in your lessons" rather than becoming lost in their artistic endeavors (Ishiguro, 557). This absorption preserves the illusion of a meaningful life narrative until the moment of unavoidable confrontation with their function. Moments of trauma occasionally pierce this illusion, such as when Ruth, frustrated during the Norfolk trip, exposes the underlying reality, exclaiming that they are "modelled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps" (Ishiguro, 345). Beneath the sheltered simulation of a soulful identity lies the terrifying recognition that their existence is entirely disposable. In the end, the Hailsham initiative, though motivated by a desire to improve conditions, produces a poignant but fragile fabrication of humanity—an elaborate simulation that conceals the clones' brutal reality, as when the school's officials emphasize that "their overwhelming concern was that their own children... did not die from cancer" (Ishiguro, 547). Once Hailsham closes, the simulation collapses (Ishiguro, 549), leaving students to confront a world in which the recognition of their "soul" holds no power over their predetermined fate.

6. Hyperreality and the Construction of Narrative Selfhood in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

At this stage, autobiography ceases to be purely representational and becomes performative, producing identity as a textual simulation. Critics such as Parkes and Black, cited in Connors (2023, p. 616), emphasize empathy and affective connection as central to understanding the clones' experiences. While important, this perspective underestimates the performative dimension of the narrative: memory and testimony do not merely evoke emotional response but actively construct identity, enacting a textual simulation of selfhood that persists independently of external recognition.

The identity that Kathy H. develops throughout *Never Let Me Go* exemplifies the Fourth Order of Simulation (Baudrillard, 1981). This

hyperrealself is maintained solely through circulating discourses and manufactured memories, existing without any primary biological or existential referent. Since the clones' lives are structured to conceal the void of their utilitarian origins in the Third Order, their sense of self depends on the performative construction of memory and testimony, transforming the past into a self-sustaining fiction.

Kathy's narration itself functions as the central mechanism of hyperreal identity construction. She establishes herself in the present through her professional role as a carer, defining her existence through her work: "My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years" (Ishiguro, 1). Her value is demonstrated through the outcomes of those in her care: "My donors have always tended to do much better than expected" (Ishiguro, 1). The memoir project is undertaken explicitly to manage her impending transition, driven by an "urge to order all these old memories" (Ishiguro, 76). By organizing and recounting the past, Kathy fabricates a stable self, replacing an unstable reality with a coherent narrative.

Although Baudrillard's orders of simulacra provide a useful framework for understanding Kathy's hyperreal identity, they do not fully capture the affective dimension of her narration. Kathy's memories convey longing, attachment, and moral awareness, eliciting empathy and reflection from the reader. Ishiguro thus resists the idea that identity can be entirely reduced to circulating signs: the narrative preserves an emotional and experiential residue beyond the logic of pure simulation. This tension highlights how literary performance can sustain affective depth even within a hyperreal structure, preparing the analysis to explore how selective recollection, testimonial framing, and institutional discourse sustain the clones' constructed selves throughout the text.

Without a natural lineage, Kathy and her peers rely on their shared history at Hailsham as a hyperreal anchor—a substitute origin. Kathy observes that her deep bond with Ruth and Tommy stems from "the fact that we knew and remembered things no one else did" (Ishiguro, 4). This shared memory becomes a commodity, a transferable form of existence: a dying donor listens to Kathy's stories of Hailsham so that "maybe during those sleepless nights... the line would blur between what were my memories and what were his" (Ishiguro, 6). Memory here

operates purely discursively, generating belonging that transcends the physical body and creating a hyperreal childhood that can be shared even by outsiders.

The students' lives are further sustained through engagement with hyperreal fantasies that, although false, provide existential motivation. The deferral rumor, pursued by Tommy and Kathy, is an elaborate discourse built on the idea that their art—the supposed proof of their “soul” (Ishiguro, 357)—might reveal the truth of their love and grant reprieve. While the rumor proves “a wishful rumour. That’s all it ever was” (Ishiguro, 532), its emotional significance remains, demonstrating that the discourse itself produces a substantial reality, independent of any factual basis (Ishiguro, 532, 557).

Kathy's search for a referent for her sexual urges further illustrates hyperreal logic. Lacking a normal human origin, she turns to external signs, such as pornography magazines, seeking her “possible,” the model from whom she was cloned (Ishiguro, 372). She believes that finding a visual representation of her model “would just... explain why I am the way I am” (Ishiguro, 372). This act reflects a hyperreal logic: the external sign is treated as validation of the self, rather than the self-giving meaning to the sign.

Finally, the hyperreal self is secured through deliberate preservation of discourse against the inevitability of bodily demise. When Kathy accepts that Tommy has “completed,” her identity does not collapse with the loss of relationships or the body itself. Instead, it is anchored in the text of her memories: “Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that’ll be something no one can take away” (Ishiguro, 590). Her self, generated and sustained by testimony and memory, achieves its final, inviolable form only through archiving in the discourse of the novel itself.

7. Discussion

Kathy H.'s narrative in *Never Let Me Go* exemplifies a progressive traversal through Baudrillard's four orders of simulacra, offering insights into both the ethical dimensions of the clones' lives and the destabilization of conventional autobiography. At the outset, her memoir operates within the First Order, presenting recollections as transparent, faithful reflections of experience. This stage emphasizes material and sensory details, professional competence, and

conversational intimacy, creating the impression of a coherent, grounded identity. Ethically, this early phase establishes a provisional contract of trust with the reader: the clones' lives appear meaningful, even as their inevitable disposability remains unacknowledged.

The Second Order emerges as euphemism, institutional digression, and narrative delay intervene to obscure the harsh realities of organ donation and premature death. Kathy's narration mirrors Hailsham's systemic masking, demonstrating how discourse functions both as protection and as control. Here, the ethical stakes of simulation intensify: masking shields the clones from existential despair but simultaneously enforces compliance and perpetuates exploitation. The narrative itself becomes a site in which truth is mediated, manipulated, and selectively withheld, emphasizing the moral complexity of constructed memory.

In the Third Order, simulation no longer reflects or distorts reality but generates a reality in its absence. Kathy and her peers inhabit a fabricated identity—shaped by Hailsham's art projects and the notion of the soul—that conceals the emptiness of their origin. The ethical tension of this stage is explicit: survival and psychological resilience are achieved through the acceptance of a socially sanctioned fiction, yet this very fiction sustains their commodification and ultimate demise. Art projects, deferral rumours, and shared narratives operate as hyperreal proofs, sustaining subjectivity where none would exist independently.

The Fourth Order realizes the hyperreal self, in which identity is constituted entirely through discourse, memory, and testimonial practice. Kathy's memoir, her recollections of shared experiences, and her archival preservation of Hailsham function as the medium through which selfhood persists, independent of any biological or historical referent. At this stage, ethical concerns shift to the implications of sustaining identity through simulation alone: Kathy achieves a durable sense of self, yet this self is disentangled from material reality, highlighting the moral ambiguity of a hyperreal existence that simultaneously validates and conceals structural oppression.

This progression destabilizes conventional autobiography. Traditional memoir presupposes a coherent subject with traceable origins and a linear

relationship between past and present. Kathy's narration subverts these assumptions: her identity is contingent, circulated, and performative, mediated through collective memory, institutional scripting, and fabricated referents such as the "possible." The novel demonstrates that autobiography can function not as a documentation of reality but as a hyperreal construction, where recollection itself produces a self-sustaining fiction. Memory operates both as a mechanism of survival and as evidence of simulation, emphasizing the postmodern contingency of personal identity and questioning the assumption that life-writing can ever transparently capture existence.

While Baudrillard's model illuminates the novel's recursive logic of simulation, it encounters limits when faced with the affective dimension of Kathy's narration. Ishiguro's prose continually reintroduces emotion, attachment, and moral reflection into a system that, by strict Baudrillardian logic, should be emptied of such depth. This persistence of affect suggests that *Never Let Me Go* does not merely exemplify the hyperreal but also exposes its insufficiency: even within simulated realities, feeling endures as an epistemological remainder. Recognizing this excess extends Baudrillard's framework, positioning Ishiguro's narrative as a site where postmodern theory is both tested and refined.

In synthesizing these observations, *Never Let Me Go* presents narrative and memory as ethical, epistemological, and ontological terrains. Kathy's evolving narration demonstrates how simulation structures subjectivity while simultaneously revealing the limits and responsibilities of storytelling. By tracing the progression from reflection to hyperreality, Ishiguro dramatizes the ethical stakes of cloning and exploitation, while interrogating the very possibility of authentic selfhood in a mediated, posthuman context.

8. CONCLUSION

In *Never Let Me Go*, Kazuo Ishiguro presents identity as a product of simulation, showing how the self emerges in the absence of a genuine biological or historical origin. Through Kathy H.'s retrospective narration, the novel illustrates how memory, testimony, and institutionalized discourse collectively produce a hyperreal subjectivity. Following the progression of Baudrillard's four orders of simulacra, Ishiguro demonstrates that personal identity does not function

as a straightforward record of lived experience, but as a performative configuration of signs, recollections, and fantasies. This study contributes to Baudrillardian scholarship by applying his typology to a single narrative consciousness, tracing how simulation operates internally as a mechanism of self-construction rather than externally as a social phenomenon.

While much existing criticism emphasizes the novel's ethical, affective, or biotechnological concerns—such as empathy, bioethics, and posthuman care—these readings often presuppose an underlying human essence. In contrast, this analysis situates *Never Let Me Go* within the logic of the hyperreal, where authenticity itself is a constructed notion. The memoir form enacts selfhood rather than representing it, transforming autobiography into a generative simulation that maintains subjectivity solely through narrative discourse. In doing so, Ishiguro not only exemplifies Baudrillard's orders of simulacra but also exposes their limits, demonstrating that affect and moral awareness can persist even within purely mediated systems.

These findings reframe critical approaches to Ishiguro's work and provide a lens for examining postmodern narratives that explore artificial or replicated identities. Texts such as Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* or other speculative fictions addressing reproduction and control can similarly be analyzed through this framework to reveal how simulation shapes both narrative structure and ethical perception. Moreover, the study highlights literature's role as a site for theoretical experimentation, where narrative voice enacts, challenges, and refines philosophical models.

Future research could extend this approach comparatively, investigating Ishiguro's cinematic adaptations or other posthuman fictions across media, to explore how visual and temporal techniques influence the affective and ethical dimensions of hyperreal identity. Hence, *Never Let Me Go* demonstrates how fiction can serve as a form of theoretical critique, where narrative performance becomes the space in which technology, ethics, and subjectivity intersect under conditions of simulation.

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