

# The Uncanniness and the Othering of the ‘Androids’ and the ‘Clones’ in Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*

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## Abstract

The article gives an explanation of the definition of ‘the Other’ and tries to explore how the technological Others namely the Androids and the Clones in Philip K. Dick’s novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and in Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel, *Never Let Me Go*, are treated as ‘the Other’ using the Theory of the Uncanny.

Keywords - androids , clones, dyspathy, empathy, return of the repressed, ‘the Uncanny,’ ‘the Other,’

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The article provides the context of the novels, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Never Let Me Go* detailing the reasons behind the ill- treatment and Otherisation of the androids and the clones. It further explicates and substantiates the thesis question: What makes the androids and the clones as the Other? by drawing solid proofs from both the novels and concludes with the answer for the thesis statement.

Philip K. Dick was a renowned American writer who wrote novels and short story collections centered on the science fiction themes. Dick’s famous works include *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *A Scanner Darkly*, *Ubik*, *The Man in the High Castle* and others.

Kazuo Ishiguro is a living British author and a Nobel Laureate. He is very often identified as a diasporic writer having his origin in Japan. Ishiguro's novels include *A Pale View of Hills*, *The Unconsoled*, *Never Let Me Go*, *When We Were Orphans* and *The Buried Giant*.

## **2. Context : *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?***

Philip K. Dick's novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), is set in a post-apocalyptic San Francisco where all living creatures either suffer or become extinct after the nuclear war called World War Terminus. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the protagonist Rick Deckard is a bounty hunter entrusted with the responsibility of 'retiring,' a euphemistic word, meaning 'killing,' the spaced Nexus-6 androids from Mars.

In the novel, Rick Deckard's society had been divided into different categories : namely 'regulars' or normal humans who lived in urban areas and were in touch with fellow humans living on the devastated earth, 'the specials' who due to their low mental calibre were asked to stay in abandoned outskirts and dilapidated buildings covered by 'kipple' or 'dust' because of the fear of them polluting other healthy humans and the 'androids' who due to their illegal entry into earth are given no place and are destined to roam about without being found, since they were hunted down by the bounty hunters like Rick Deckard and others. The androids with no place in the society confirms their status as 'the Other.'

### **2.1. Empathy, dyspathy and the Othering of the Androids**

Empathy, the central concept in the definition of humanity, comes from the ancient Greek word 'empathia' meaning 'physical affection or passion.' According to Collins dictionary, "empathy is the ability to share another person's feelings and emotions as if they

were your own” (“empathy”). In short, empathy is placing oneself in another’s situation or is the ability to be in someone else’s shoes.

Dyspathy, on the other hand, is the lack of feeling and it includes negative feelings like aversion, hatred and disgust. The Otherisation of the artificial constructs can be understood clearly by analysing the instances related to empathy and dyspathy of humans towards the androids.

Collins dictionary defines ‘the Other’ as “a person, group or entity perceived as being the opposite of or completely separate from or alien to oneself or one’s group”(“the other”). ‘The Other’ is someone or something that is different or alien. They are ‘Otherised’ since they do not fit into the norms or standards set by a group. Their inability to live up to the expectations of the said group is what makes them ‘the Other.’

In Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the androids elicit either empathy or dyspathy in humans. Empathy in humans towards androids depend on various factors such as utility, companionship and similar experience common to both ‘the other’ and the human. Rick Deckard develops feelings towards female androids like Rachel Rosen and Luba Luft initially because of their usefulness, their placid nature and their appealing looks unlike male androids like Polokov, Roy Baty towards whom he develops hatred due to their ruthlessness.

Deckard admires Luba Luft for her talent as an opera singer with an exceptional voice surpassing even some human singers. Deckard feels guilty after retiring Luba Luft as he found her to be of use to humanity eventhough she’s an android. He tells fellow bounty hunter Phil Resch that the human world could have used her for the better. “She was a wonderful singer. The planet could have used her. This is insane” (Dick 108).

Similarly Deckard even after he comes to know that Rachel Rosen is an android after subjecting her to the Voigt-Kampff Test, an empathy test used to find out if the person in

front of them is a human or an android, doesn't retire her. Instead he leaves her because of the help and assistance she promised to offer him while confronting the escaped androids.

Another instance of empathy towards androids happen in John Isidore due to his lack of companionship and similarity of experience between him and the androids Pris, Roy Baty and Irmgard Baty. Isidore gives refuge to the androids Pris, Roy and Irmgard and does not care if his companions are humans or androids. Isidore and the androids Pris, Roy Baty and Irmgard share a similar experience that is a sense of alienation in their society. ““Okay, J.R. I'll move in with you and you can protect me.’ ‘A-a-all of you,’ Isidore said immediately”(Dick 126).

Dyspathy towards androids in humans stem from the fear of being superceded, from their coldness and their disloyalty. Often dyspathy results in ‘Otherisation’ of the androids. Since the androids don't seem to fulfill the prescribed norms set by humans, they are inevitably treated as ‘the Other.’ In the novel, most of the human characters show animosity and treat the androids indifferently because of their feeling of dyspathy.

*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is set in a technologically advanced and equipped society where the androids are perceived as ruthless, disloyal and potentially harmful. “It had engineered the killing of a variety of human beings...followed by the flight to Earth”(Dick 146). The androids' killing of the humans in Mars, and their flight to earth made humans on earth detest the androids further and they also saw this as a reason to retire them.

Dyspathy also gushes up in humans due to the androids' ability to supercede humans and do potential harm. Androids try to overpower everyone whom it comes into contact with, be it humans or androids just to save itself from the possibility of getting retired.

Rachel Rosen speaks to Deckard without a bit of empathy when she comes to know that she has a copy of herself in the name of Pris Stratton after whom Deckard is. She is keen in saving herself and is not bothered a bit if Deckard gets killed or not. Also Rachel admits

that androids have no loyalty telling Deckard that Pris would destroy her and take her position. By telling this, she unknowingly hints at the fact that she too doesn't have any loyalty and would be willing to save only herself at any cost when situation gets worse. "I'm just an observer and I won't intervene to save you; I don't care if Roy Baty nails you or not. I care whether I get nailed"(Dick 150). "I don't dare go because androids have no loyalty to one another and I know that that goddamn Pris Stratton will destroy me and occupy my place"(Dick 150).

Rachel Rosen's statement regarding the androids' disloyalty and the androids' dyspathy towards humans and androids alike matches with the statement made by Rick Deckard to Luba Luft about the nature of androids. Deckard tells Luba Luft that an android does not care what happens to other androids proving their lack of empathy even towards their own kind. "An android,' he said, 'doesn't care what happens to another android. That's one of the indications we look for'"(Dick 80).

## **2.2. The Uncanny and the Androids**

Another aspect that creates dyspathy towards androids is the uncanny feeling which they elicit in humans. A feeling of uncanniness is produced when an inanimate object like an android looks undistinguishably human and behaves like a human. It creates a kind of anxiety which suddenly mounts up to some kind of terror when the person is unable to decide if the one in front is a lifeless entity or a living being.

Deckard finds himself in such a state of confusion while he retires Luba Luft. Luba Luft is artistically constructed in such a way that she looks humanlike. In addition to having a realistic humanlike appearance, she behaves and acts in a way very much like human which makes Deckard doubt for a moment if he has done an unrectifiable error of executing a human instead. He has an uncanny feeling for a moment or so.

Another possibility of an uncanny feeling arises when humans behave like machines. The insecurity and terror gets sky high when humans are found to be devoid of empathy. Deckard accuses Phil Resch saying that the latter would kill him if he had a reason without bothering if Deckard's a human or an android. Deckard scorns at Phil Resch for taking pleasure in killing everyone he comes across without any difference provided that he had a pretext. This is an example of human behaving like machine.

The theory of 'the uncanny valley,' suggests that the more realistic and humanlike the androids' appearance are, the more will be the expectations it creates in humans. When they look like humans, humans naturally tend to expect the androids to behave like a human. When androids fail to behave the way humans do or when they are not able to simulate the behaviour of humans during their interactions, it immediately creates an eerie feeling or uncanniness. To put it another way, when the external realism of androids is not equivalent to the response made, the result is a strange or uncanny feeling.

Eventhough the Nexus-6 type androids try to imitate the humans and their behaviours exactly, what lies at the core of their 'being' – 'the coldness,' comes to the forefront unwittingly. Their 'coldness' propels the humans who previously accepted the androids to be human and empathetic in some way, at least at several instances to revise their judgement.

Even during his first meeting with Pris, Isidore didn't fail to take notice of the coldness that resided in Pris. Now that Pris got rid of the fear which she initially had while meeting Isidore, the cold reserve unique to the androids reared its ugly head slowly.

Pris, being an android would not have thought that a human would perceive the meaning not only by the means of language - with the help of words but would also perceive the intended meaning from the apparent behaviour, gestures and sometimes even taking the answer from their mere silence. Later on, at another occasion too Isidore feels something

strange when the android Pris Stratton's expressed emotions mismatched her behaviour increasing the height of uncanniness.

Often thoughts and emotions go together. When they contradict each other, uncertainty reigns in humans making them question the status of the one in front of them. "I like this,' Pris said, but in the same detached and remote tone as before. She meandered about, hands thrust in her skirt pockets; on her face a sour expression, almost righteous in the degree of its displeasure, appeared. In contrast to her stated reaction"(Dick 127).

When someone proposes that they like something the appropriate emotion would be that of happiness. But what Pris Stratton did was just the opposite. The emotion she let out was that of displeasure. He comprehended that they were 'the Other' through their showcased behaviour that always seemed to go against their external human realism eliciting uncanniness.

### **3. Context : *Never Let Me Go***

Clone, refers to "cell or organism that is genetically identical to the original cell or organism from which it is derived"( "Clone"). Cloned beings refer to those beings that are genetically identical in nature. Human clones are those which are the genetical copy of a human.

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *Never Let Me Go*(2005), uses unreliable narration as a technique. It has Kathy. H as the protagonist and as the first person narrator. In *Never Let Me Go*, the human clones are raised in an institution called Hailsham where they are given accomodation and education. The clones' have only two options. Either they can become 'carers' or else they can become 'donors.' What the words 'carers' and 'donors' imply are not explicitly stated in the novel. The readers come to know of their true meaning only as the novel progresses.

### 3.1. Clones and their Othering

In *Never Let Me Go*, the human clones are placed under the category of ‘the Other.’ The life of the clones can be divided into three phases: their childhood at Hailsham, their matured stage at the cottages during which they undergo prior training before the donations and their last phase during which they spend their time at the recovery centre- with the ‘donors’ donating their organs and with the ‘carers’ taking good care of those clones who are donating organs. The process of excluding, discriminating and oppressing of the inferior group by the superior group is called ‘Othering.’

In the novel, Norfolk has a special significance in Kathy’s life. It was always a source of comfort for Hailsham clones. Norfolk stood aloof in a corner jutting into the vast ocean, was out of touch with other countries of England which people of England bypassed altogether. Hence, it gets the name ‘lost corner.’ Like Norfolk, Hailsham too remained excluded, without any sort of contact with the world outside and often humans of the outside world bypassed it totally or many a time they even fully ignored Hailsham for some reasons which remain a mystery in the novel.

Clones at Hailsham were alienated and they didn’t have any contact either with the government that suppressed them through the implementation of the donation process or with the ordinary humans. Other than the guardians like Miss Lucy, Miss Geraldine, very few humans stepped into Hailsham. Nurse Trisha, nicknamed as Crow Face, by clone students, is one of the humans who would visit Hailsham in order to carry out medical checkups for the clone students. At the cottages, Keffers, the maintenance man, issuing and collecting the donation forms from the clones was the only human to have contact with the clones. At the recovery centers too, only the doctors, nicknamed as ‘whitecoats’ by the clones, were the only source of human contact for the clones undergoing the process of donation.

Madame comes to collect the artworks done by clones. She never talks to the clone students and is always particular in keeping the clones at an arm's length. In the novel, clones were always kept at a distance both proximally and psychologically, due to their status as 'the other.' No humans would ever think of visiting the clone world like Hailsham as if they would catch communicable diseases if they visit them. These instances of exclusion show how the clones were treated as 'the Other' - as a lower category.

Miss Lucy's speech to the clones reveals the purpose of 'the Other' and she tries to make it clear to the clone students that they need to readily accept what they were created for. She makes the clones' accept and accomplish their task through the means of indoctrination which serves to remind the clones' of their 'Otherness.' "Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do" (Ishiguro 80). Miss Lucy by saying, 'you're not even like me' indirectly hints at the fact that the clones are not one of them, that is, they don't belong to the category of humans, rather they are 'the Othered' lot.

The clones in *Never Let Me Go*, are objectified through the process of donation. When the clones are viewed as commodities, they are stripped off of their selfhood and subjectivity.

When Tommy gets hurt in the elbow, Nurse Trisha plasters Tommy's elbow with utmost care and safety so that the wound does not unzip and gets wider and exposed. Other clone students also caution Tommy not to bend his arm since there's the possibility of the elbow unzipping like a bag.

The idea of things 'unzipping' started merely like a kind of prank among Hailsham students. However, when some of them became donors themselves and when some others assumed the position of carers, it was at that point when they realized the real connection between 'unzipping' and 'donations.' Donations involved the unzipping of the

body and emptying oneself of the vital organs and handing them over in order to prolong the lifespan of the diseased humans. The act of ‘unzipping,’ proves how clones are handled like objects.

During Kathy and Tommy’s last encounter with Miss Emily and Madame, Miss Emily blurts out the bitter fact that the clones were used only as suppliers of organs to the field of medical science. Emily’s use of words like ‘supply’ and ‘shadowy objects in test tubes’ is a reference to their objectification. The clones are reduced to the status of a lifeless object. Kathy also unconsciously makes a mention of the clones’ objectification when she utters the word ‘switch you off.’ Kathy while talking about how clones after the fourth donations feel like uses the word ‘switch off’ to refer to their death hinting at how the clones are treated as objects, being switched off just like one switches off a mobile phone or a computer.

Language used by the guardians also facilitates ‘the Othering’ of the clones who are demeaned and seen as less than human. For example, the word ‘unzip,’ which is used to refer to donations demeans the clones’ value. Negative terms like ‘gutter’ meaning the place where waste accumulates, ‘trash’ meaning something of low quality like garbage, ‘junkies’ meaning a person who is illegal or immoral are used to reveal how unimportant the clones are in the world of humans. “We all know it. We’re modelled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps.” (Ishiguro 164).

### **3.2. The Uncanny and the Clones**

The concept of ‘the Uncanny’ meaning a sense of strangeness is linked to that of ‘repression.’ Though Madame works diligently for the clone children and their rights to be treated in an equal and humane way just like normal humans, she too has that awful and inexplicable fear within her about the clones. Madame gets frozen in shock when the clone

students surround her since the clones' were what is called as 'the return of the repressed.'

"The uncanny arises as the recurrence of something long forgotten and repressed, something superceded in our psychic life = a reminder of our psychic past"(Gray).

The clones, being the 'mirror image' or being 'the double' of the humans immediately elicit the feeling of 'uncanniness' and they are what the human beings have repressed long ago. Madame's shudder gives answers to the reason behind the oppression and 'Otherisation' of the clones. "We're all afraid of you" (Ishiguro 264). Guardians had tough time fighting against the disgust that arises at the sight of clones while working for their betterment. Since the guardians too are humans, they are not spared of the fear that haunt them. For humans, the fear and isolation of clones stem from the fear of being displaced by them. Displacement here refers to the actual replacement of humans by clones.

Miss Emily tells Kathy and Tommy that this fear of displacement has always been present somewhere in the realm of the unconscious, which was intentionally avoided by the means of 'repression' - that is the unpleasant desires, memories or unresolved conflicts are purposely forgotten or simply ignored and pushed into the unconscious. "Linked with this is the idea of *repression*, which is the 'forgetting' or ignoring of unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires, or traumatic past events, so that they are forced out of conscious awareness and into the realm of the unconscious"(Barry 93-94).

In the novel, humans were complacent thinking that their organs came somewhere from 'vacuum'. However, the Morningdale scandal which went too far creating enhanced children, produced tantrums in humans since the clones which existed only in their imaginary, suddenly came in front of them as if in a dream- denoting Freud's 'the return of the repressed.' As long as the clones were away from humans both proximally and psychologically, the humans in the novel had no qualms about their existence. But the moment, humans had the knowledge about the source of the organs which they received from

the clone children who were raised in institutions just as normal children, they detested and grew defiant of the research. It later on resulted in the closing down of Hailsham and other so-called homes meant for clones. With the increase of the fear level in humans, clones were given least care and were made to grow in deplorable conditions.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the clones and the androids appearance mirror that of the normal humans. The humans instantly identify with the clones and the androids due to the similarities shared by them just as a child does when it looks itself for the first time in the mirror. At the same time, this identification with the androids and the clones also create and confirm the differences in both, leaving the humans fragmented. This apparent difference between the humans, the clones and the androids and the uncanny feeling which the latter two elicit estranges the humans from the androids and the clones with whom the former identified sameness initially, thus making them ‘the Other.’

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