Victimhood in Selected Post-Millennial British Fiction

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‘suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning’.

Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (2004)

**Abstract**

This thesis considers victimhood and associated states of trauma—interpreted through various key theorists, including Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Fatima Naqvi and Joshua Pederson—in three examples of dystopian post-millennial British fiction. The first chapter focuses on a methodological and critical outline of a range of theorists and contexts explored in the subsequent analysis and interpretation, as well as introducing key features of the novels featured in following chapters. The second chapter outlines both the figure of the scapegoat and realities of victimisation found in Jim Crace’s *Harvest* (2013). It details both the associated rituals and the terror used to intimidate local villagers, so as to reconfigure their land, switching from common access to sheep-farming, relying on authority imposed to achieve such dispossession and repurposing. I draw on Karl Marx’s observations concerning enclosure and René Girard’s on scapegoating. Other important theorists deployed include Lucien Dällenbach on *mise en abyme*, and François Flahault on the monstrous and malice. The third chapter details the plight of clones raised for organ harvesting who feature in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005), which is analysed through twin key themes of *Homo Sacer* (as outlined and theorised by Giorgio Agamben, as well as Slavoj Žižek) and abjection. The fourth chapter considers analytically alienation in the context of relevant theories that explain such states of being in Rupert Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom* (2005). The analysis considers the way the novel’s four new dystopic states reconstruct brutally and radically social life in Britain by creating artificial, enforced families, each guided by the pseudo-science of one of the four humours. I draw on both Louis Althusser’s concept of Ideological State Apparatuses, or ISAs and Marx’s earlier theory of Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) that influenced Althusser. I conclude by arguing that these three selected novels are correlated and offer an intimate understanding of victimhood in post-millennium British fiction.

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To My Parent

**Chapter One: Context and Critical Introduction**

**1.1 Introduction and Structure of the Thesis**

Among the most prominent characteristics of post-millennial British fiction is its focus on victimhood and associated trauma, which I will consider through close analytical reading of three selected novels: Jim Crace’s *Harvest* (2013), Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2004), and Rupert Thompson’s *Divided Kingdom* (2005). The selection of these particular novels is informed by intensive study of a wide variety of literary works focused on victimhood, some of which I will also refer to in this thesis. Significantly, each of the selected novels is set at the site of intersecting calamities, and their narratives reveal varied symptoms of victimhood. The texts have the capacity to provoke a critical reflection upon violence and associated atrocities that arguably dominate contemporary culture. As with much literary fiction, these issues impinge upon their characters’ social lives and the sense of each of the character’s subjectivities.

I was drawn to research victimhood in recent British fiction because its presence is widespread, yet is also surprising in the context of an affluent and powerful nation like Britain. One way of accounting for this is that the authors draw upon the relation of victimhood to the country’s colonial past. This colonial history would seem to place Britain in the role of powerful actor rather than victim, however, as this thesis will explore, the situation is more complex. As Fatima Naqvi (2007) notes: ‘Common sense indicated that the West is still, in economic and political terms, in a position of superior power and, if anything, victimizer rather than victim’ (1). Here Naqvi responds to Jean Baudrillard’s ‘concern with the western self-perception as victim irrespective of any concrete harm [...]’ (1). Indeed, in an interview with Philippe Petit, Baudrillard describes the West as a ‘“victim society”’ (1998, 15). Using this phrase to describe the West’s self-image may have seemed provocative at the time; nevertheless, it is significant that he made this statement almost thirty years ago, as the number of critics and cultural commentators who share his view has significantly increased in recent years. Diane Enns (2012), for example, notes that ‘we compete for victimhood status’ (4), while Trudy Govier (2015) observes that ‘In historical debates and conversation about acknowledgment, we find competition for status as victim, referred to sometimes as Victim Olympics. Who deserves the most memorial attention? Whose group was the worst and most grievously wronged? Who suffered the most?’ (10). Such observations indicate that there is a cultural tendency to seek the status of victim, indicating perhaps that there is a certain privilege in being able to do so. Alyson Cole (2007) agrees with this notion, confirming that there is a cultural propensity towards victimhood. However, she also claims that there is a ‘crusade to shame victims’ (2), and the status of ‘victimhood has been vilified’ (2) as a result of such systemic campaigns. Regardless of this divergence of views, it is evident that the discourse of victimhood in the West is expanding and becoming more contested, and that its effects can thus be traced in many contemporary works of fiction in Britain. Indeed, it is notable that the depiction of a victim society tends to be projected onto dystopian and apocalyptic landscapes. As Slavoj Žižek (2012) notes, ‘Beyond the fiction of reality, there is the reality of the fiction’ (4). In other words, our attempts to fictionalise reality serve as a guide to the subjectivity of our experience of reality.

Despite the focus of many recent novels on victimhood, there has been little attention from literary critics on this topic, which this thesis seeks to redress by conducting a comparative analysis.[[1]](#footnote-2) The ultimate aim is to explore the nature of and reasons for the preoccupation with victimhood in British fiction published after the new millennium. Equally, the thesis seeks to investigate the significance of victimhood (broadly conceived) and correlated notions of suffering that structure the narratives. By scrutinising the chosen corpus of texts, I will frame the psychological and societal aspects that affect the victims in the novels by referring to theories of prominent writers and critics whose works address revealing aspects of the psych and cultural construction of victimhood. These include the following: René Girard, whose work I will draw upon primarily, though not solely, with regard to the sacrificial; Giorgio Agamben, mainly using his work on *homo sacer* and marginalisation; Karl Marx, on alienation and the destruction of pre-capitalist communitarian modes of production; and Sigmund Freud, for his thoughts on the unconscious and the Oedipal. I will argue that victimhood in a former colonial power is a key paradigm for understanding power in contemporary global society.

Indeed, bringing Girard and Agamben together is challenging, since they come from distinct ideological backgrounds; while Girard is a social theorist, Agamben’s work focuses on politics. Yet their views are crucial for understanding victimhood, particularly the type of victims they present to mark what they see as the origin of the political. For Girard, he asserts the presence of religion at the genesis of the political. As he argues, ‘the whole range of cultural products, politics included, [are] fruits of the sacrificial system’(Fox, 2007, 565), contending that victims of scapegoating keep potential violence (that threatens the existence of society) at bay. Agamben, on the other hand, takes a secular path, as he insists on the absence of religion at the root of the political. He instead presents the Roman victim, *homo sacer* (the unsacrificial figure who yet can be killed with impunity), to argue that the political is ‘a sphere with a law of its own’ (Fox, 2007, 565). Nonetheless, the sacred is a decisive term for both thinkers due to its ambivalence. Hence, the conclusion of this thesis will argue that understanding the sacred – from these two perspectives – is crucial for a true understanding of victimhood. My original contribution to knowledge is arguing for this synthesis and reading contemporary fiction in its light.

There are multiple questions that this thesis seeks to address within the fold of its chapters, which I will outline below. For Chapter Two: what is the mechanism of scapegoating? What effect does it have on our interpersonal relationships? And above all, to what extent does this mechanism influence our ability to distinguish a victim from a victimiser? As for Chapter Three: What is the significance of first-person narration in terms of victimhood and trauma (for all the narrators of my selected novels are traumatised)? What is the role of language in violence? How do guilt and shame define our actions? Chapter Four explores the following questions: How do authorities control the population ideologically? Is it possible for the individual to overcome the imposed alienation?

This thesis is arranged thematically into four chapters. Following the Introduction, each chapter focuses on an individual novel, and are titled as follows: *Harvest,* ‘The Scapegoat and Victimisation’; *Never Let Me Go,* ‘Homo Sacer and Abjection’; and *Divided Kingdom,* ‘Alienation’. The sequential order of the novels in this thesis, on one level, illustrates the history of civil control; from the social contract during the period of feudalism, which features in *Harvest*, to the total disappearance of social relations in the futuristic setting presented by *Divided Kingdom*. On another level, the organisation of this thesis schematically adopts Nils Christie’s (1986) notion of the ideal victim, which he defines as ‘*a person or a category of individuals who – when hit by crime – most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim*’ (18) [emphasis in original].[[2]](#footnote-3) Christie contends that the legitimacy of such status is subject to a ‘general belief-system’ (23), which differs from one cultural framework to another. He presents women as a striking example of such temporal change in the public belief, noting that women ‘weak or old, have not always been ‘“ideal victims”’ mobilizing our sympathy. Today we can see the old witches as victims of oppression. But that is four hundred years too late’ (22). The order in which the novels are introduced is symbolic of this observation; from the witch hunting in *Harvest* to the mayor’s wife who the protagonist of *Divided Kingdom* recognises her as a victim of oppression.

Chapter One, ‘The Scapegoat and Victimisation’, explores the portrayal of victims of scapegoating as featured in Jim Crace’s novel *Harvest*. Indeed, for a focused analysis of this concept in contemporary British fiction, Crace’s novel is in many ways an exemplary narrative, since the author himself states that it is based *consciously* on a form of scapegoating (Center, 2013), which is the practice of holding a person or a group of people accountable for crimes or wrongdoings they did not commit in order to gain benefit. The novel’s structure and plot accentuate this type of victim by stressing the complexity of the victim’s social relations. The novel also allows for a deep exploration of the historical origin of this archetypal victim, so that the mechanisms underlying their actions and relations to others – including their paradoxical role in society – can be properly explored. The main objective of this chapter is to explore the sacrificial aspect of how a new cultural framework emerges by examining the transformation of what used to be a common right (an unnamed village inhabited by families of peasants) into a private property for raising sheep. The novel complicates this transition by presenting a series of disasters that appear to justify collective and centralised violence, resulting in a new social structure. Indeed, Girard’s work is useful to navigate towards this objective, since he situates ‘Sacrifice [as] the centre of human culture’ (Berry & Hardin, 2015). This will lead to the exploration of Girard’s theory of conflict, which is mimetic desire. He posited this as the leading cause of the sacrificial crisis. Since the transition presented in Crace’s novel evokes the historical shift from feudalism to capitalism, Marx’s materialist theories are needed to supplement Girard’s. By the end of this chapter, an understanding of the sacred from the religious perspective will have been achieved.

In Chapter Two on ‘Homo Sacer and Abjection’, I will consider Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*. In this novel, the depiction of the clones as a marginalised community who are kept in isolation until they are killed and their organs are harvested, embraces a scenario that echoes Agamben’s provocative claim that the concentration camp is a hidden paradigm of forces that potentially prevail even in apparently democratic states. The fact that the clones are impotent, literally and symbolically, may validate this view of them as disempowered victims. However, I will explore the fact that the clones are colonial subjects. Indeed, this perspective is adopted by many critics including Ji Eun Lee (2019), who argues that ‘*Never Let Me Go* is set in an imagined past of colonization of clones’ (273). One of the main objectives of this chapter is to highlight the significance of the Bildungsroman in relation to victimhood and trauma.[[3]](#footnote-4) Additionally, it will shed light on Baudrillard’s simulation by considering the protagonist’s role as a carer and the artificial creativity sustained by the given system. Furthermore, it will argue that the relationship between the clones and their boarding school, Hailsham, takes the form of a bad parent and its victimised child by examining the process of indoctrination that produces passive subjects with a perverse mentality; namely, an enjoyment and even willing participation in their own victimhood, despite the inflicted suffering and the implicated trauma that surfaces on the protagonist’s narration. Regarding trauma, I will respond to trauma theorists who insist on the amnesia inducing nature of trauma. This includes Cathy Caruth (2016), who asserts that: ‘Traumatic experience […] suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it …’ (91-92). The response to this claim will draw on Joshua Pederson’s (2014) suggestion that trauma rather sharpens the victim’s memory of the event. The overall aim of this chapter is to scrutinise the condition of *homo sacer* and explore the ambiguity embedded in such status of victimhood.

In both *Harvest* and *Never Let Me Go*, the individual’s being appears to gradually diminish due to coercive hegemons exerting their economic power and discipline on the population. Thus, the theme of alienation emerges as a distinctive attribute in both narratives. This feature will be explored in more depth in Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom* in the Fourth Chapter, ‘Alienation’, which is divided into four sections. The first two sections analyse the novel’s intellectual and social context, providing a solid platform for the analysis in the proceeding sections. Following this, a discussion of the influence of the new social formation on the individual’s behaviours in society is provided by applying Louis Althusser’s concept of Ideological State Apparatuses. In brief, these are social institutions (such as schools, places of worship, media outlets, family) which serve the primary ideology of the state by non-physical means. These apparatuses as depicted in the novel facilitate a violent condition, whereby the residents of each region perceive the others as a threat. The final section considers whether the reappropriation of the essence (or the authentic self) is feasible under such economic and social dominance by relying on both Marx’s and Georg Hegel’s notions of alienation. The latter claims that in the modern liberal state the individual is able to reconcile with nature and society, but Marx contends that capitalism has placed the individual in a state of self-estrangement. The argument will be guided with reference to Sean Sayers’s (2011) reading of Marx’s concept of alienation, in which he asserts that ‘an understanding of Hegel’s philosophy is essential for proper understanding of Marx’ (x). The overall aim of this chapter is to further our understanding of the social conditions that maximises the individual’s vulnerability, preventing him/her from attaining autonomy.

The rest of this introductory chapter is divided into three sections: Apocalyptic Imagination and Dystopian Vision; Theorising Victimhood and Trauma; and Violence. The first section will highlight the difference between the apocalyptic and dystopian genres. It will then explore the reason for the ubiquity of post-millennium apocalyptic and dystopian novels. Finally, it will set out the strategy that has been followed in choosing the selected novels. The aim of the second section is to explore and understand the etymological meaning of both victimhood and trauma. Also, it will define these core terms by drawing on the work of Enns, Cole, Goveir, and Caruth. The last section is devoted to a review of the works of Girard and Agamben, whom this thesis is heavily reliant on.

**1.2. Apocalyptic Imagination and Dystopian Vision**

Both *Never Let Me Go* and *Divided Kingdom* can be catagorised as dystopian in genre while *Harvest* is apocalyptic. The difference between these two categories is well-established in literary theory. While dystopian works depict perfected systems sustained by tyrannical regimes, apocalyptic novels envision the dissolution or collapse of an existing order into an ominous one. Despite these differences, they are still conceived as intimately related genres. As Benjamin Kunkel (2008) observes, ‘What the dystopian and the apocalyptic modes have in common is simply that they imagine our world changed, for the worse, almost beyond recognition’ (90). Bookstores are replete with novels that adhere to these two genres, yet it seems that ‘apocalyptic fictions […] lately outnumber their dystopian counterparts’ (90). And as Diletta De Cristofaro (2019) notes, ‘That ours is a culture pervaded by apocalyptic anxieties has become almost a truism’, adding that ‘The commercial success of post-apocalyptic franchise […] indicates just how profitable a business “owning the end of the world” is’ (2). Clearly then, our anxieties are reflected in the output of our artists. However, it seems self-evident that the ubiquity of novels within these genres is also linked to political factors rather than purely economic ones.

Indeed, for Calvert Jones and Celia Paris (2020): ‘The boom [of dystopian novels] appears to have begun after the terrorist attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001’ (n.p.). The aesthetic response to this historical event is evident in a wide variety of anglophone literature, including those originating in other contexts, such as British dystopian works (such as *Divided Kingdom*) and apocalyptic novels (such as *Harvest*).[[4]](#footnote-5) Moreover, it has been argued that the Twin Towers terrorist attack and other related post-9/11 events, such as the 2005 London bombings, have altered the reader’s perception of dystopian worlds. As Efraim Sicher and Natalia Skradol (2006) observe,‘9/11 was an intrusion of the real that made it impossible to un-imagine dystopia as nightmare or fantasy’ (152). They go on to argue:

What 9/11 has shown is that the relationship of the real and the imagined in dystopian fiction has been reversed, since hypermediated image has eclipsed the event and fiction has become lived experience. There is an uncanny sense of an end that has been almost predestined […]. (153)

Such a disruption of meaning is apparent in other disasters, the most recent being Covid-19, which seemed to transform the world into a surreal dystopian reality, reducing the gap between the fictional and the living real, and familiarising the unfamiliar. We were forced to keep a safe distance from others, avoid public spaces, adhere to total curfews in some countries, and live life in an extremely restricted and isolated manner. As Žižek, in his *Pandemic!: Covid-19 Shakes the World* (2020), notes, ‘it’s not only the state and other agencies that will seek to control us, we should learn to control and discipline ourselves!’ (43). Such self-discipline has few boundaries in terms of time and space, adding another nightmarish element to the epidemic, and its effect on readers of upcoming fictional futuristic worlds is guaranteed.

For Kunkel (2008), the quantity of post-millennium apocalyptic and dystopian novels is not as significant as the shift of the imaginations of such themes into far grimmer visions than the traditional, pre-millennial novels of this type. Cristofaro (2019) also notes such a change in the trajectory of apocalyptic novels:

while in the disparate apocalyptic scenarios that the contemporary produces “apocalypse” denotes a catastrophe of overwhelming proportions and dystopian consequences that leads to the end of the world as we know it, in the traditional apocalyptic paradigm “apocalypse” is essentially about a “revelation” of a sense-making utopian teleology. (3)

Such a fundamental change implies widespread societal pessimism and an almost complete loss of faith in what was once envisioned as a prosperous future. Indeed, this observation by Cristofaro is significant, as it concurs with Baudrillard’s (1998) claim that the Western ‘utopia has fallen apart today’ (14). Such a commentary comes in the context of the threatened destruction of most of the underlying values (a range of socio-cultural truths once believed by the majority, often now referred to as grand narratives) that have grounded western society since the beginning of the nineteenth century. These values have now lost their gravity and their ability to anchor our worldview because they have shown an inability to help us reach the goals that had been promised; primarily, equal human rights and true democracy. According to Baudrillard (1998), these universals disappeared through self-liquidation to become indifferent. They enter ‘a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials […]’(Baudrillard, 1994, 2), and thus, the hyperreal is produced.[[5]](#footnote-6) For Baudrillard (1998), such a crisis of meaning was accelerated by the collapse of the Berlin Wall, which he claims, ‘had no liberatory consequence’ (9) for the Eastern bloc. Yet, as he explains, just as its collapse heralded the end of the communist utopia, it also signaled the end of the Western utopia:

The two systems are contaminating each other. The one sends the other its technologies and markets; the other sends back its pollution, viruses and angst. Things aren’t finally settled, but I think what has triumphed isn’t capitalism but the global, so to speak, and the price paid has been the disappearance of the universal in terms of a value system. (10)

Here, Baudrillard argues that the fall of the Berlin Wall initiated a disorder, which profoundly destabilised both the Western value structure and Communist ideology, whereby each side interfused with the other. Such a negative exchange is inherently dystopian, since it displays an obliteration of all that distinguishes one system from the other. According to Baudrillard and Petit (1998), globalisation is also to blame, since it ‘sweeps away all differences and values, ushering in a perfectly in-different (un)culture’ (10). Hence, what has been imagined as utopian eventually transforms into an Orwellian nightmare.

This perspective still exists in novels that incorporate dystopian characteristics in a utopian tableau; the latter is either presented by the state or imagined by the protagonist.[[6]](#footnote-7) Such a feature evokes Gregory Claeys's (2016) observation that ‘the relation between utopia and dystopia may be more intimate still’, adding ‘like the snake in the Garden of Eden, dystopian elements seem to lurk within Utopia’ (6). Novels with such features often depict societies misled by falsehood, or rather ideal dreams of improvement, presented and propagated by the very few to pave the way for political transformation. Paradoxically, those in power employ human rights rhetoric to sugarcoat the threat to society posed by their political ambitions. As Eliza Krizas (2016) notes, ‘Human rights are by nature utopian’, and rhetoric invoking these ‘may be used to create communities of citizens and redefine “the enemies”, who are deprived of these rights’ (n.p.). Hence, human rights can be formulated to create a marginal being prone to various forms of violence. As I will argue, all three novels featured in this thesis use this device through groups that are classified collectively: the newcomers in *Harvest*, the clones in *Never Let Me Go* and the White People in *Divided Kingdom*.

Indeed, novels of a dystopian and apocalyptic nature serve to address the questions of this thesis well, because rather than the individualised suffering usually featured in many other fiction sub-genres, they foreground the potential collapse of whole groups and communities. This is also evident in China Miéville’s dystopian novel, *The City and the City* (2009), in which he presents two cities – Besźel and Ul Qoma – which exist in one geographical space but that are ideologically separated. The people of both cities are trained from a very young age to neither look at the residents and the buildings of the other city, nor to cross the designated non-physical borders (there are exceptional cases, such as for tourists and children). This process is so ingrained that the narrator admits parenthetically: ‘(There had once been a fire grosstopically close to my apartment. It had been contained in one house, but a house not in Besźel, that I had unseen. So I had watched footage of it piped in from Ul Qoma, on my local TV, while my living-room windows had been lit by the fluttering red glow of it)’ (81). Despite the two cities existing cheek-by-jowl, whoever transgresses by breaking the fundamental rule of not looking into the other domain, even if by mistake, is subject to draconian punishment, “‘*No one can admit it doesn’t work. So if you don’t admit it, it does. But if you breach, even if it’s not your fault, for more than the shortest time … you can’t come back from that*’” (370) [emphasis in original]. The inhabitants are raised to un-see and un-sense; a negation of their basic instincts. It is notable that these bleak details are not revealed all at once, or at the beginning of the novel, but as a backdrop is gradually painted as the narration progresses. The main storyline in the novel revolves around a murder that the inspector and narrator Tyador Borlú investigates. Miéville toys with his readers, since he ‘deliberately lures the reader into the world of New Crobuzon, setting his story within an alternative space whose cartographic similarities to London hint at a possible allegorical tale – which it is not. An assumed connection between the cities is rather misleading’ (Zähringer, 2017, 55). In fact, the two cities are counterfactuals of Eastern and Western Berlin, hinting at the ideological separation of the iron curtain.

Another example that is related to the themes explored in this thesis is David Mitchell’s post-apocalyptic novel, *Cloud Atlas* (2004), in which he combines multiple genres, including dystopia and apocalypse. The novel consists of six stories, each of which is framed in a vastly different setting. Despite this, they are all related, as each main character reflects on the life of the preceding protagonist. The first story is set in Chatham Islands, an island chain in the Pacific Ocean, in 1849, where an American lawyer, Adam Ewing, is saved by a stowaway slave, Autua, after being deceived by his only friend Dr. Goose. The next is set in Belgium in the 1930’s, wherein a bisexual English composer, Robert Frobisher, narrates his story with the once brilliant musician, Vyvyan Ayres, in the form of letters to his lover Rufus Sixsmith. The third narrative is set in California in 1975, wherein a young journalist, Luisa Rey, investigates the safety of a nuclear power plant after accidentally meeting the whistleblower, the elderly Rufus Sixsmith. Timothy Cavendish is another elderly character. He is the protagonist of the fourth story, which is set in present-day Britain. After fleeing from a gang of brothers, Cavendish finds himself imprisoned in a nursing home rented by his brother. A dystopian landscape is featured in the fifth story, which takes place in futuristic Korea, wherein a clone named Sonmi~451is interrogated for resisting the sinister authorities. The last story is also futuristic, wherein Zachary retrospectively narrates the story of his people, the Valley Folks, who worship Sonmi, the rebel clone. Each story provides a warning for the next protagonist, which each subsequent character fails to comprehend. As Jennifer Rickel (2015) observes, ‘Even though these characters detect and disparage bigotry in each other’s stories, they often fail to question similar discrimination in their lives’ (160). This is because victimisation is perceived differently in each temporal frame, touching upon Christie’s (1986) ideal victim.

The strategic difference of the narratives chosen for analysis within this thesis is that they are mapped on specifically British sites. *Never Let Me Go* (2005), for example, is a dystopian narrative of Britain with an alternate history and socio-cultural coordinates subtly suggested. James Tink (2016) outlines a number of these features:

Ishiguro’s novel combines aspects of popular literary genres, principally science fiction with school-based stories or adolescent fiction, to describe life in an alternative 1990s England where human cloning has been somehow perfected and the clones, or ‘donors’, are bred simply to provide limitless organ donations for the humans until they reach premature deaths. (23-24)

Tink does not address the notion of victimhood, despite this promising perspective. Unlike Mitchell’s rebellious clone, the protagonist of Ishiguro’s novel, Kathy H, submissively acts as a guardian chaperoning other younger clones who will eventually be used as organ donors (as she herself will also be). Poignantly, she reflects upon her former boyfriend, a victim of this elaborate social process, which is a weaving together of a culture of trauma with the horrific logic of cloning human beings. She recalls the following event that occurred during their upbringing at a school set apart from the wider community:

Tommy thought it possible the guardians had, throughout all our years at Hailsham, timed very carefully and deliberately everything they told us, so that we were always just too young to understand properly the latest piece of information. But of course we’d take it in at some level, so that before long all this stuff was there in our heads without us ever having examined it properly. (81)

The dictation of knowledge is a major power device which penetrates the clones’ lives. This process of indoctrination is subtle and pervasive to keep this group under complete control; in a state of being simultaneously excluded and included. Their short lives are caught in a socio-cultural antagonism that this system masks, involving quite different impulses. According to Yugin Teo (2014) ‘There are two opposing forces at work […]: one is the desire of the nation to deny the existence of the clones, and the other is the clones’ desire to cling to their memories; one is a desire to forget, the other a desire to remember’ (128). The latter is represented by the clones’ discussions, which are significant for Lee, since ‘Kathy’s act of reconstructing the memories of a certain moment together with her friends also suggests that remembering requires a collective effort’ (279), and that alone they cannot retrieve its underlying potential meaning, which applied specifically to their sharing ideas concerning ‘Exchange’ and ‘Sales’ (unique traditions with a capitalist basis, operating exclusively inside the clones’ school, Hailsham). One might extend this point by quoting Kunkel (2008): ‘the clone novel can hardly fail to suggest a nightmare of perfected neoliberalism’ (92), for such novels depict societies governed by states that exist ‘only to keep the peace in wealthier districts and ensure the continued functioning of market and labor and other commodities’ (92). Indeed, the manifestation of neoliberalism is clear in Mitchell’s novel, as the clones or ‘fabricants’ are given a servile existence in a corpocracy with the only goal of serving the ‘consumers’ (188). Equally, Ishiguro’s clones exist merely for those whom the authorities classify as normal human beings. Despite their plight, Kathy and the other clones still show passivity towards their victimisers, and willingly adhere to the euthanasia imposed by this sinister system.

In highlighting the ideological differences underpinning both dystopian (particularly those which Kunkel classifies as ‘the clone novel’) and apocalyptic works of the new millennium, Kunkel (2008) stresses that ‘the contemporary apocalypse […] illustrates in the most literal fashion possible Margaret Thatcher’s famous dictum that there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families’ (94). This is evident in Crace’s latest works, *Harvest* (2013) and *The Pesthouse* (2007). The latter offers a futuristic vision of post-apocalyptic America in which a mysterious plague known as the ‘Grand Contagion’ has killed much of the population. *Harvest*, on the other hand, is set in an unnamed English village, where a set of dramatic challenges bring about fundamental changes to a peasant society (Shaw & Aughterson, 2018, 23). In the resulting vacuum, a new power structure emerges, committed specifically to transforming land ownership and usage, shifting the collective paradigm of common rights to one centred on the Lord of the Manor. Importantly, given Crace’s commonly acknowledged quasi-Marxist inclinations, *Harvest* evokes Karl Marx’s (1992) discussion of the history of enclosure by landowners in England and their cruel displacement of the working class, who were often replaced by sheep.[[7]](#footnote-8) The final scene confirms Kunkel’s observation, as the market is the ultimate destiny of the community once they lose their sense of solidarity through a series of socio-political upheavals.

As is also present in Crace’s earlier works, the use of an archaic language interwoven with a modern one is evident in *Harvest*. As Philip Tew (2007) notes in relation to *Continent* (1986), *The Gift of Stones* (1988), and *Quarantine* (1997), ‘The verbal repetition patterns the narrative in the manner of Biblical and evangelical accounts, as if they might offer transcendence or poeticism […]’ (151). In *Harvest*, such linguistic devices aestheticise fundamentally recognisable images that are moulded in a society which undergoes a chaotic atmosphere, wherein the archaic victim – the scapegoat – surfaces to display contemporary British issues. Indeed, this type of victim also features in *Never Let Me Go* and *Divided Kingdom*. However, in *Harvest,* the victim is exemplary because it emerges in a community that falls prey to internal violence stirred by a catastrophe, which effectively transforms the social structure into a mob of persecutors targeting three newcomers. These series of events eventually separate the society into smaller entities of families, forcing them to leave the place that once fostered their collective interests. This also echoes the following observation provided by Kunkel (2008):

The corollary view holds that “society” is merely the excuse used by tyrannical regimes like the Soviet one to justify the trampling of individual rights – and the contemporary apocalyptic works are all but united in stigmatizing any group larger than the family as oppressive and evil. (94)

In dystopian novels, however, such stigmatisation expands to engulf even the family. This is evident in Thomson’s dystopic novel *Divided Kingdom* (2005), where Britain’s population is assigned arbitrarily – in the so-called Rearrangement – to quarters, according to the (early modern notion of) humours, whichever they appear to exhibit most strongly.[[8]](#footnote-9) The ‘Red Quarter’, where the narrator is first sent, is occupied by the ‘sanguine’ cheerful people, whereas the ‘Yellow Quarter’ contains angry or rather aggressive ‘choleric’ people. Furthermore, the ‘Blue Quarter’ is inhabited by a ‘phlegmatic’ populace, while the ‘Green Quarter’ comprises miserable ‘melancholic’ individuals.[[9]](#footnote-10) Each quarter is protected by strict borders that are demarcated by interlocking high-wire fences. These partitions are further enforced by armed guards to keep the peril of ‘psychological contamination’ at bay. This draws a clear parallel with the ideological and physical separation of East and West Germany in the form of the Berlin Wall, which was erected and guarded to protect the populace in the Soviet sphere from ideological contamination. There are other less pointed details of historical affinity offered to the reader. As Barbara Piatti and Lorenz Hurni (2009) note: ‘The plot provides only little hints of a past that resembles ours, e.g. the current members of the Royal Family have also been ‘re-arranged’ according to their personalities’ (339), including the Queen as phlegmatic, her husband choleric and her eldest son melancholic.

Within this new system in many ways the family remains the main target. The protagonist Thomas Parry recollects a teacher, Miss Groves, at a new school he attends briefly prior to his allocation to a new family, informing the students that ‘the family had been in serious decline for years, decades even [...]. in short, the family could be responsible for society’s disintegration […]’ (14). She ascribes this societal malfunctioning to the absence of any harmonious links between family members. This results in the authorities using ‘Rearrangement’ centres to separate members of families according to their new orthodoxy. In the narrative there exists a residue of Thomas’s original familial relationships, but the numerous details of his non-biological motherless new family predominate in the account of his life featured in the text. The chosen and designated name of this family is Parry, and the unit is formed of a father named Victor and a sister, Marie. As a result of the imposed division, the Parrys’ relationship is unstable, and each individual struggles in various ways, each seemingly maladapted at an unconscious level. However, resistance seems unlikely, for as Pierre Bourdieu (1996) points out:

This space of possible impresses itself on all those who have interiorized the logic and necessity of the field as a sort of *historical* *transcendental*, a system of (social) categories of perception and appreciation, of social conditions of possibility and legitimacy which, like the concepts of genres, schools, manners and forms, define and delimit the universe of the thinkable and the unthinkable […]. (236) [emphasis in original]

In other words, by orienting the interplay between the mode of thinking and the social structure, the agent’s matrix of action is socially determined, complying with issues of legitimacy spontaneously. In the novel, the authorities’ efforts to change the social formation through fear and by means of reforming the family is supplemented by the support of various public institutions, such as schools, and via media reinforcement. Ultimately, the authorities seek complete ideological control over the population, and the manner of the *Divided Kingdom’s* imposition of a new order seems to offer particular affinities with Althusser’s (2014) concept of Ideological State Apparatuses, or ISAs, as explained previously. Indeed, in analysing such social structures and their effects, Althusser refers to Marx’s theory of Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), which are bodies that prompt the dynamic of transformation between modes of production (including the way or manner public social life is produced) through the use of violence (threatened and implicit, or explicit and actual). In Thomson’s narrative those who are most victimised, the band of hooded and stateless mutes known as the White People, finally both recognise and adapt to their plight in a Darwinian manner; having evolved a sort of telepathic ability. However, in the earlier stages of the novel, complicity is the norm with the protagonist stating in justification of his support for this system: ‘I had to fight for the system, I had to believe in it’ (63). The degree of coercion and implied discipline is described by the narrator:

Throughout the divided kingdom the walls of concrete blocks had been reinforced with watch-towers, axial crosses and even, in some areas, with mine-fields, which rendered contact between the citizens of different countries a physical impossibility. If you have been classified as sanguine, then you remained in the Red Quarter for the term of your natural life. Attempts to cross the border illegally were punishable by prison sentences, and if you defied the guards they had the right to open fire on you. All this to prevent what was now being referred to as ‘psychological contamination.’ (24)

Such panoptic surveillance, which emphasises the centrality of authority, is evident in each of the chosen novels. Paradoxically, however, very few of the decisions taken or actions that occur and which animate the embedded conflicts and create the calamities suffered are taken in good faith. In fact, they are more subject to either bad faith decisions or positions arrived at through a certain indifference. These include the following notable examples. Firstly, in *Harvest*, the punishment of the strangers and the death that results. In this case, the protagonist and his Master are both culpable in different ways. There is also the lie initiated by the villagers to protect the miscreants involved. In *Divided Kingdom,* the rearrangement on the part of the rulers and the associated bureaucracy in which the protagonist is complicit. And in *Never Let Me Go*, the indoctrination of the clones by the Guardians and society at large. Of course, victimhood is portrayed in a complex manner within these novels, mirroring the situation in life, and thus this thesis is an attempt to clarify the complexity of victimhood by identifying types of victims and analysing their surrounding conditions.

**1.3. Theorising Victimhood and Trauma**

At this point, it is useful to further explore the meaning of victimhood and ask who and/or what might constitute a victim. Etymologically, the word is intimately connected with sacrifice. The word victim originally comes from the Latin word ‘victima’, which means sacrificial animal (Dijk, 2009).[[10]](#footnote-11) This etymological link can also be found in many European and world languages, including present-day Hebrew and Arabic (Dijk, 2009, 2), while ‘In German victims are called *Opfer*, a word meaning both the sacrifice and the sacrificed object’ (Dijk, 2009, 1). This word also resonates with monotheistic theology, reconfirmed in Christian belief through the sacrificial figure of Jesus. Interestingly, in both the Old and New Testaments, victims of crimes are never referred to as victims, but rather as the ‘beaten ones’ (Dijk, 2009, 4). Furthermore, the word victim is not used directly in reference to Jesus prior to the sixteenth century (Dijk, 2009, 4). This means many centuries passed before the word ‘victim’ becomes more common, with the popular usage (away from the sacrificial) of someone suffering an injury, or one deceived or cheated in an emotional context, including infidelity.

As for a working definition of ‘victim’ for the purpose of this thesis, there are a number that have been suggested by scholars whose works not only imply a state of trauma, but primarily deal directly with victimhood. Here one must acknowledge that not all victims are traumatised, but very many clearly are. Govier (2015), for instance, offers a very simple and clear rendition, stating that ‘a victim is an innocent person harmed, through no fault of his own, by an external force or the wrongful act of another’ (19). Others specify victimhood with specific contextual intentions, such as Enns (2012), whose aim is to highlight the violence inflicted upon victims. She ‘define*s* a victim as one who has been intentionally harmed by another, either physically or psychologically, whether directly or indirectly through the suffering of a loved one’ (10). Cole (2007) provides another, not so straightforward explanation, concluding that there are four attributes by which the observer is able to distinguish a true victim from a bogus one. These are ‘propriety, responsibility, individuality, and innocence’ (5):

*Propriety*: The True Victim is a noble victim. He endures his suffering with dignity, refraining from complaining or other public displays of weakness. *Responsibility*: The True Victim […] assumes victimhood reluctantly or, even better, rejects the status altogether. *Individuality*: Victimhood is an individual status even when a group is injured collectively. *Innocence*: […] True Victims have not contributed to their injury in any way. Secondly, the victim is morally upright; he must be pure. (5)

This set of qualities, which seem more commandments than mere attributes, is problematic, since they assume the boundaries by which one can include or exclude an individual from being considered a true victim. Such a line is extremely elusive because not all victims exhibit the same level of suffering. Take the example of the child-soldier (a theme that is featured in *The Child’s Elephant* (2013) by Rachel Campbell-Johnson), whose status as a victim is equivocal. Militarised children are victims, yet they are not purely innocent. For those who claim that a child-soldier ‘is a pure victim, as he is most often considered, then it seems necessary to erase all consideration of his victims and focus on those who forced his hand. This ignores the fact that those who recruited him may also have been child soldiers whose hands were forced’ (Enns, 2012, 118). Indeed, the case of child-soldier elicits our sympathy because they are victims of those who recruit and coerce them into killing. However, this compassion should not lead us to disregard their own victims. The notion of the child-soldier is also embedded in Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom*, as the authorities enlist children to spy on their allocated families to report behaviors that do not comply with the assigned quarter, making the public suspect even in their own households. After gaining his allocated father’s trust, for example, Thomas recounts Victor’s confession:

‘We haven’t talked a great deal,’ […]. ‘That’s my fault entirely. I’ve had other things on my mind, I’m afraid. Also, to be honest, I didn’t trust you. I was sorry for you, of course, being taken from your family like that, and I felt responsible for you in some strange way, but I didn’t trust you.’ […]. ‘That sounds dreadful, I know.’ (38)

Here, Victor confirms Thomas’ victim status while simultaneously admitting his capacity to inflict harm, despite his age of eleven. His expression is imbued with guilt for transgressing the moral code set by the authorities.

Having outlined the first two definitions above, in addition to Cole’s characteristics, it is now possible to establish a correlation between defining victimhood in terms of both its linguistic origin and the relationship of the term to the psychological trauma engendered by not being in control of one’s fate due to negative treatment by others. To do so leads us to the approach adopted by Naqvi (2007). According to her survey, all *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions are applicable, including Govier’s definition, which ‘corresponds to the *OED* definition 2.a., “one who suffers severely in body or property through cruel or oppressive treatment”’ (9). However, the appearance of the victim as a sacrificial object, as indicated in the *OED’s* first definition (a victim is “a living creature killed and offered as a sacrifice to some deity or supernatural power”) seems of more import for her, as it alone corresponds to the etymological meaning of the word victim. At first glance, this connection to sacrifice may seem extreme to our modern society. However, the selected novels raise this possibility, with all its appalling moral implications. It appears then that in the contemporary world, suggesting such a dynamic is appropriate.

Moving now to another core term used and explored in this thesis: trauma, which derives from the Greek word *traumatikos*, which simply means wound. Caruth’s reference in *Unclaimed Experience* (2016) to the ‘originary meaning of trauma’ (3) might seem to imply the predominance of a corporeal dimension. However, the manner in which she extends its applicability leads one eventually to a position whereby the concept of the traumatic is transfigured into the realm of the wounded mind, which effect victim’s ability to recollect the actual event. It therefore has potential implications for the social fabric and relates to victimhood – even vicarious victimhood – a predominant positioning for many subjects. This transformation from a literal wound to a psychic one is a key element in many contemporary British novels that foreground trauma and victimhood.

Both Caruth (2016) and Naqvi (2007) draw their arguments from Freud’s analysis of trauma, which connects to Irene Visser's (2011) observation that all ‘genealogists of trauma agree that Freudian psychoanalysis remains the theory’s explicit and inevitable foundation’ (273). Freud’s engagement with trauma can be chronologically divided into two stages. First, he suggests that trauma is an outburst of sexual repression and is experienced during puberty through the act of remembering. As Visser (2011) observes: ‘Trauma is thus defined as the painful *remembering* of an experience which in itself need not be painful’ (273) [emphasis in original], which reflects Naqvi’s reflection on Baudrillard’s statement related to victim society. This first phase starts with *Studies on Hysteria* (1985) and ends with Naqvi’s primary reference *Totem and Taboo* (1913), which focuses on the phylogenetic side of trauma. Freud’s trauma analysis evolution in the second stage comes with his later works, including *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), both of which Caruth’s work relies upon. Indeed, the temporal element of trauma is crucial for both views. However, while Caruth (2016) focuses on what Freud describes as *traumatic neuroses*, Naqvi (2007) restricts her analysis to the dual meaning of *Opfer,* which means both victimisation by wrongdoing and victimisation by sacrificial act. Interestingly, Naqvie (2007) notes that there is no great difference between Freud’s depiction of victims and that of Baudrillard (10). Freud endeavors to outline the circumstances that according to Naqvi lead to ‘the affective condition of a generalized victimhood [which] bears affinities to the intangible psycho-social malaise that Baudrillard describes’ (10). It is notable that this sentiment still broadly dominates western society, and this becomes doubly evident when considering recent literary works.

Gail Finney (2018) asserts that ‘We live in an era of traumatic discourse’ (vii), adding that ‘The traumatic experience is frequently rendered in fantastic terms […] which can be read as displaced manifestations of post-9/11 paranoia or of a generalized culture of trauma’ (vii).[[11]](#footnote-12) This particularly applies to situations in which there are disruptions (often with dystopian features) of what Jenny Edkins (2003) calls ‘the linear time of the standard political processes, which is the time associated with the continuance of the nation-state, events that happen are part of a well-known and widely accepted story. What happens fits into pattern’ (xiv). This would also apply to the social order of western societies, but this social order is displaced in such fiction with aesthetic effects that discompose readerly expectations, incorporating elements of what Edkins (2003) describes as follows: ‘In trauma time, in contrast, we have a disruption of this linearity. Something happens that doesn’t fit, that is unexpected– or that happens in an unexpected way’ (xiv). Such challenging features, which mirror or mimic the condition of traumatic victimhood and its various symptoms, are precisely why I have selected the fiction that features in this thesis. Such works resonate with these important factors that not only influence the British literary scene, but also constitute a large part of the unconscious socio-cultural life of the wider population. In much the same way that Edkins (2003) uses Milan Kundera’s novel, *The* *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1980), to challenge ‘a linear narrative of national heroism’ by offering ‘resistance to state narratives of commemoration’ (xv), I will critique works that can facilitate or even articulate such countervailing views in a British context and thereby shed light on contemporary victimhood within twentieth-first century British fiction. Additionally, similar to Naqvi’s critical interpretation and response, my project focuses more on the cultic and ritual possibilities in victimhood and associated trauma, but without overlooking the various other dimensions inherent in the various definitions cited and outlined above.

**1.4. Violence**

Violence is certainly implicated in both trauma and victimhood. Yet its arbitrary persistence in all human affairs (Arendt, 1970), defuses the many attempts to comprehend its complex reality. At first glance, violence seems to be easy to identify, such as physical conflicts. In this form of violence, which is termed subjective violence by Slavoj Žižek (2009), the established order is disrupted and therefore draws our attention when it occurs. Other types of violence, however, are not ordinarily visible, because such forms reside within what most people perceive as normal. Describing these objective forms of violence, Žižek (2009) says:

First, there is a ‘symbolic’ violence embodied in language and its forms […] this violence is not only at work in the obvious – and extensively studied – cases of incitement and of the relations of social domination reproduced in our habitual speech forms: there is a more fundamental form of violence still that pertain to language as such, to it imposition of a certain universe of meaning. Secondly, there is what I call ‘systemic’ violence, or the often catastrophe consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems. (1-2)

These categories are invisible (or difficult to perceive), since such violence ‘sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent’ (Žižek, 2009, 2), and thus will require more attention to be recognized as such. For the purpose of this thesis, these two types of objective violence are analysed by relying on two perspectives that further our understanding of victimhood. The first is the cultural thought of the French literary critic and anthropologist, Girard. Indeed, his work is crucial to situate both sacrifice and victimhood in terms of both the contexts outlined above and to understand how such themes are featured in the selected fiction explored in this thesis. This perspective also supports Baudrillard’s provocative commentary, as Naqvi (2007) observes, since both share the apocalyptic vision. The second view is the political and focuses on systemic violence, which may acquire certain symbolic aspects within power relations. This perspective relies mainly on the work of the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben.

In *Violence and the Sacred* (2005), originally published in 1972, Girard delves into various fields, including mythology, theology, anthropology, and psychoanalysis, to ‘explore the relationship between sacrifice and violence’ (2). The underlying paradox around which he frames his sociological view is that society resorts to victimisation to curb violence. In short, once internal conflict emerges, instead of punishing the wrongdoer, the community resorts to sacrificing a victim. Such a substitution reconciles the opposing groups and restores peace to the community. Hence, the underlying mechanism of the sacrificial act is to substitute the culprit with a victim that appeases violence sufficiently and diverts its fury from spreading like a plague across society. As Girard notes, ‘violence is not to be denied, but it can be diverted to another object’ (4) – the third party. Girard reminds us that ‘there is no essential difference between animal sacrifice and human sacrifice’ (10). In both cases, the sacrificial victim is ‘chosen only because it is vulnerable’ (2) and has some tangential connection to the community that wishes its death. This could include marginal groups, lower-class individuals, or even a central figure such as the king.

In his reading of Freud’s Oedipus complex, Girard (2005) formulates his most notable hypothesis, mimetic desire, which he later (2001) describes as ‘our neighbor is the model for our desire’ (10). For him, desire is not an innate phenomenon, but rather an acquired characteristic. As Žižek (2006) puts it: ‘there is nothing spontaneous, nothing natural, about human desires. Our desires are artificial. We have to be taught to desire’ (n.p). Despite its essence being suggested as neutral, Girard (2001) paradoxically contends that mimetic desire is the permanent source of conflict:

MIMETIC DESIRE does not always result in conflict, but it frequently does so for reasons that the tenth commandment makes evident. The object I desire in envious imitation of my neighbor is one he intends to keep for himself, to reserve for her own use; she will not let someone snatch it away without combat. My desire will be thwarted, nine times of ten my desire will resist this and become even more intense in imitating the desire of its model. (10) [emphasis in original]

Soon, this imitation becomes reciprocal and eventually transforms the subject and his model into rivals, and if this deadlock of rivalry is not contained, the stability of the whole community is ultimately threatened. To prevent such conflicts, Girard (2001) argues that one is bound to respect the Decalogue, particularly the tenth commandment: ‘You shall not covet the house of your neighbor. You shall not covet the wife of your neighbor, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything that belongs to him’ (Exod. 20:17); for all objects are variable but the neighbor, who is always present.

Considering this Girardian theory, one can conceive the communal decision to assign a victim as a political distinction between enemy and friend, bringing to the fore Carl Schmitt’s decisionism philosophy. In *The Concept of the Political* (2007), Schmitt argues that ‘The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy’ (26). For him, this antithesis is autonomous and has no relation with any other opposites, be it moral (evil/good), aesthetic (beauty/ugliness), or even economic. It is rather a concept that unequivocally declares the individual’s position, since ‘the distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation’ (26). During a conflict, as Schmitt (2007) notes that only those who attend it have the capacity to measure and comprehend the status quo, and therefore also have the capacity to mark such a distinction. Hence, both Girard and Schmitt share the binary logic or the religious perception of victimhood.

Agamben, in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995)*,* discusses the *bare life* position and quality within society. This draws on Ancient Greek, which has two words to express a living creature. The first is ‘*zoē’*, which is a common word for any living being including ‘men, animals, or gods’ (1). The second is ‘*bios’* which must only be used for a single human being or a group of human beings who live an appropriate lifestyle. This is due to their membership in the sovereign power of the body politic. ‘*Zoē’*, on the other hand, designates a bare life, that is excluded from this political zone of meaningful and accorded citizens. This being the case, a life without sufficient status, ‘*zoē’* can be killed with impunity, whereas it is a crime to kill a member from the ‘*bios’*.[[12]](#footnote-13) The emergence of *homo sacer*, however, is the result of a reduction process within the bio-political body to exclude a member or group of people from ‘human and divine law’ (82) in which they become animal-like, in effect inhuman. *Homo sacer*, according to Agamben, is the ‘sacred man who *may be killed yet not sacrificed’* (8) [emphasis in original]. This ‘double exclusion’ ascribes complex meaning to *homo sacer*; his sacredness allows him to be within God’s boundaries, yet he is unsacrificeable. And although he is a member of the community, it is not a crime to kill him. Put simply, *homo sacer* is not an authentic life like ‘*bios’* or ‘*zoē’*, but rather the result of political deformation with regard to his/her rights.

The central claim of Agamben’s argument is that despite the outwardly extreme divergence between contemporary western democracies and totalitarian regimes (the one apparently free, the other oppressive as regards individual rights), the functionality of sovereign power in both systems is the same or essentially the same. Indeed, if one assesses the limitations of action imposed by all centralised states, the conjoining of both through a category of underlying congruity seems reasonable. Agamben (1995) sees such a similarity in relation to Foucauldian bio-politics, which is ‘the growing inclusion of man’s natural life in the mechanism and calculations of power’ (119). It is through this governmentality that the unpolitical figure *zoē,* or “bare life” (whose rights are gained by birth) has been politicised, by means of placing the human body into the political realm through exclusion. As Agamben (2005) argues:

[It is] The sovereign, who can decide on the state of exception, [which] guarantees its anchorage to the judicial order. But precisely because the decision here concerns the very annulment of the norm, that is, because the state of exception represents the inclusion and capture – of a space that is neither outside nor inside (the space that corresponds to the annulled and suspended norm) […]’ (357)

This means, in effect, that the sovereign is paradoxically outside of the legal order whilst embodying it. Hence, the power of exclusion of others either individually or in terms of categories rests in the hands of the sovereign. For Agamben (2005) ‘*Being-outside and yet belonging*: this is the topological structure of the state of exception […]’ (35) [emphasis in original]. Such broad powers over citizens (inclusion/exclusion) underpin and legitimise state sovereignty, in which process force (of a complicit, implicit or explicit kind) is central (Agamben, 2005, 38-39). A good proportion of contemporary fiction seems predicated at least implicitly on an understanding of such dynamics as outlined by Agamben, teasing out the violence and coercion that subtend even the most basic or local examples of exerting authority (such as in a village or in a school), an idea which all my selected novels incorporate.

To restate the objective of this thesis, the overarching aim is to present a thorough analysis of the concept of victimhood. This is understood (from secular and religious perspectives) and aestheticised via the framing of types of victims that have appeared in the works of a plethora of post-millennial British writers through a reading of three selected novels: *Harvest*, *Never Let Me Go*, and *Divided Kingdom*. These novels portray their victims in a remarkable manner, for each narrative is told from a first-person perspective, drawing attention to the narrator’s plight by foregrounding certain central negativities that radically diminish the lives of the characters with little promise of rehabilitation or hope. Specifically, through the portrayal of the literary landscape and a depiction of characters as victims, potentially traumatised, one may begin to chart the dynamics of victimhood and identify its key characteristics.

Here I have explained the central aim of this thesis, its focus in terms of literary texts, its theoretical underpinnings in terms of literary, philosophical and social critique, the key terms that are to be explored, and explained its general structure. The following chapter focuses on victims of scapegoating in *Harvest,* explores the sacrificial aspect of victimhood as key to understanding how it operates in a contemporary context.

**Chapter Two: The Scapegoat and Victimisation in Jim Crace’s *Harvest***

The focus of this chapter is on the function of collective scapegoating and associated themes and contexts of Jim Crace’s ninth novel, *Harvest*. The theoretical framework of this analysis largely rests upon René Girard’s work, as introduced in the previous chapter. It also draws upon key observations drawn from Georges Bataille’s *Eroticism*: *Death and Sensuality* (1986), Ernst Cassirer’s *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Volume Two: Mythical Thought* (1955), Lucien Dällenbach’s *The Mirror in the Text* (1989), François Flahault’s *Malice* (2003), and Paul Ricouer’s *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967). *Harvest* is constructed on an understanding of victimhood that is akin to that which Girard outlines in his analysis of scapegoating, religiosity and violence. More specifically, it depends upon the scapegoat mechanism, and what Girard (2005) identifies as ‘the violent impulse that lurks within the rite of sacrifice’ (334). Unlike Agamben, who rejects the binary logic of religion by presenting the Roman non-sacrificial sacred man (a figuration that this thesis will discuss more broadly in the following chapter), Girard charts a religious course of development by claiming that human culture is the product of such a sacrificial system. Despite their ideological differences, to achieve a full understanding of the complexity of this novel requires elements of both theories, which can also be used in order to comprehend the overarching mechanism by which its community enters the boundaries of victimhood from both the religious and political perspectives. The key focus of this chapter is an analysis the novel’s set of disasters that justify collective and centralised violence, constructing as a result a new creed of prohibitions. These disasters and ensuing violence are explored in light of the various implications these have upon collective identity. In other words, how these arrays of disasters dramatically change the self-perception of a group of proud peasants to that of collective victimhood.

In *Harvest,* the soft power over an unnamed local backwater lies in the hand of Master Charles Kent, an older man whose ownership of the manor and local village is obtained by ‘right of marriage’ (18). His land is also in the process of being newly constituted through a new mapping process that he has introduced. Its intended outcome is enclosure, which is initiated not by his previous type of laissez faire control, but rather by the violent interventions of his nephew, Master Edmund Jordan, and a set of thuggish followers. Such a pattern arguably runs parallel to an actual historical process which was described by Karl Marx (1992). In his first volume of *Das Kapital* originally published 1867, Marx illustrates in detail the historical annexation of such lands in England, which entailed initially a concentration of power ‘by means of individual acts of violence’ (885), and later was confirmed legislatively. According to Marx (1992):

While the place of the independent yeoman was taken by tenants at will, small farmers on yearly leases, a servile rabble dependent on the arbitrary will of the landlords, the systematic theft of the Communal property was of a great assistance, alongside the theft of the state domains, in swelling those large farms which were called in the eighteenth century capital farms, or merchant farms, and in ‘setting free’ the agricultural population as a proletariat for the needs of industry. […] It was not only land that lay waste, but often also land that was still under cultivation, being cultivated either in common or held under a definite rent paid to the community, that was annexed by the neighbouring landowners under pretext of enclosure. (886-887)[[13]](#footnote-14)

Such an implied indifference to established relations and community rights is embodied in *Harvest* in the figure of Master Jordan, who represents an entirely new class of men; acquisitive and focused on wealth to the detriment of others. The underlying logic follow that outlined by François Flahault (2003) as subtending the monstrous: ‘since I have lost my dignity, I might as well surrender all appearances of acting well, and instead make the most of a shameful, unrestrained line of conduct […]’ (69-70). Hence, the novel evokes the underlying question of how governments initiate new systems and laws. Although the narrative sets out a tableau of a peasant society and its fundamental dynamics in motion, on a topographical level, the narrative presents issues very similar to those confronting immigrants in contemporary Britain. As with Crace’s villagers, the latter are rendered effectively landless and powerless by their move away from their place of origin. Indeed, the issue of immigrants is a dilemma for Britain in the new millennium, which the novel expresses allegorically, and which this chapter seeks to explore. The novel even has Walter Thirsk ruminate in decidedly Cracean terms on the new family of outsiders who cause such a stir. According to him, ‘Some extra working hands be of value in the coming days, especially since my own left hand will be of little use and we are so hard-pressed for younger men and women’ (20-21), but the villagers remain hostile.

The novel is set an unnamed remote English village inhabited by a virtually closed community that largely consists of blood-related families who inter-breed. The village is governed by the childless widower Master Kent. Another widowed man, Walter, is both the protagonist and first-person narrator. Walter became a villager a dozen years earlier than when the narration begins, accompanying Master Kent whom he once served. Soon after their arrival, the now widowed Walter had married Cicely Saxton, a daughter of this community, and moved from the attic of his master’s manor to a cottage among the other villagers, albeit not being fully accepted by the locals. After a new family has arrived in the area Walter reflects, ‘My land-born neighbours now are ditched and fenced against the outside world’ (21), implicitly foreshadowing a potential disagreement or conflict.

The closed community has its own rituals and laws that newcomers must adhere to, and one of those regional customs which some newcomers adopt is to announce their arrival through a smouldering fire. During harvest day, a column of smoke rises from the village, declaring the entrance of a group of potential new inhabitants to the village’s boundaries; ‘this first smoke has given them the right to stay’ (1), according to Walter’s narration. At the same time, a second column of smoke arises on the top of the village, initiating a collective gathering to investigate the unusual scene. It turns out that one column is the result of facilities near the manor house being accidently set ablaze, while the other emerges from a newly built camp that hosts three strangers – two men and a woman – who are economic migrants fleeing enclosure elsewhere. These synchronised events drive the villagers to accuse the newcomers of setting alight the dovecote of the manor house. Their accusations are also founded on bones that are found, indicating they had eaten some of the manor house’s doves. Thus, the newcomers are victimised and, I will argue, scapegoated. Persuaded by the silence of the other villagers, Master Kent decides to punish the foreigners by shaving their heads and tethering the two men for a week in a pillory in the village that is ‘standing at the unbuilt gateway of [the] unbuilt church’ (37).

Once the punishment takes place, the village undergoes a rapidly transitional phase that is marked by another arrival of outsiders and further disturbance; the unexpected visit of Master Jordan, Kent’s heir, who is ‘attending to matters of estate’ along with ‘a party of five – his steward, a groom, and three sidemen’ (84). After the death of Master Kent’s mare Willowjack, the relations between the villagers, Master Kent, and the protagonist begin to intensify and become fractious. This incident seems to serve as a catalyst (an excuse in effect) for Master Jordan to launch coercive interventions into the lives of the villagers with the help of his violent crew. His intention is to enclose the land for other agricultural uses; primarily the raising of sheep, thereby excluding the community and denying them their traditional access to the land for arable and other purposes, formerly a collective right.[[14]](#footnote-15) This mirrors the process indicated by Marx (1992) of a change of a ‘nominal right to the land into a right of private property’ (890) being a ‘transformation into modern private property under circumstances of ruthless terrorism’ (895). The ultimate outcome is that the families decide to follow the logic of history and the accumulation of power by the very few by abandoning their cottages and leaving the village, and Walter finds himself driven to depart his home rather than face staying alone.

This chapter is divided into five sections: scapegoating as conceived historically; the disaster and blaming the other; the failure of ritual sacrifice; the birth of a new creed; and the politics of terror. In the first section, the scapegoating mechanism is defined with reference to its historical meaning that goes back to traditional Judaism. Next, the impact of the disaster upon the locals is explored, which acts as a catalyst for the mob of persecutors to turn upon the newcomers, scapegoating them for a supposed crime they have not committed. This action brings more violence upon the community instead of restoring peace. In the third section, the negative consequences of the failure of ritual sacrifice are considered, drawing upon Girard’s notion of mimetic desire. The implication of such a failure establishes a traumatic injury on the collective memory, leading the locals to experience a collective shame, a key symptom of melancholia. The birth of a new creed is the focus of the fourth section, and the mechanism of initiating a new prohibition that paves the way for the new system to impose its sovereignty is discussed. By the end of this chapter, a religious understanding of victimhood and its function will have been clearly elucidated in relation to the text’s Marxist perspective, laying the groundwork for the next chapter, which focuses on *homo sacer* and abjection in Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*.

**2.1. Scapegoating as Conceived Historically**

The scapegoat finds its origins in religious ceremony, but the term is often used in a more generalised sense: blaming the victim. According to Chip Berlet and Matthew N. Lyons (2021) ‘The word scapegoat has evolved to mean a person or group wrongfully blamed for some problem, especially for other people’s misdeeds’, and are thereby ‘demonized as malevolent wrongdoers’.[[15]](#footnote-16) This conforms to the scenario Crace creates in the novel and that the author later complicates by teasing out certain ramifications, practical and moral. However, it is crucial to define this term by referring to its etymological and historical meaning, one that is interconnected with the original violence and sacrifice (first human, later that of an animal). According to Girard (2001), the word ‘“scapegoat” is initially the victim in the Israelite ritual that was celebrated during a great ceremony of atonement (Lev. 16:21)’ (154). This ancient Jewish ceremony was housed in the Tabernacle, where two goats that shared similar looks and features were brought to the High Priest to be sacrificed. One of the goats was assigned to be slaughtered as an offer to God, while the other was condemned to be a castaway in the desert. Before the latter goat was ritually or symbolically banished, the High Priest would press his hand on the goat’s head and confess all the sins that had been intentionally committed by the community, a further symbolic transmission that was believed to purge these collective sins. As Girard (2001) notes:

This act was supposed to transfer onto the animal everything likely to poison relations between members of the community. The effectiveness of the ritual was the idea that the sins were expelled with the goat and then the community was rid of them. (154-155)

The community feared being subjected to divine punishment for committing a deliberate transgression, which implicates crossing the line of the *sacred* that holds violence within its boundary. Since violence is contagious in nature, the community would become contaminated by their sins, and thus the goat is there to purify them by absorbing their sins through the authority of the High Priest’s hand. The banished goat is then loaded with the sins and therefore has the capacity to infect whomsoever touches its skin. Even the man assigned to lead the goat outside the community’s boundaries, must bath in order to purify himself from any possible contamination gained from the goat (Rudman, 2004). In *Harvest*, the transgressions of the community are projected onto the newcomers, and the villagers deliberately silence and condemn these outsiders to suffer the punishment that the villagers fear, leading to the death of one male outsider for which the woman of this group seeks vengeance. Girard (2005) points out that such a paradox is concealed within the logic of scapegoating, as he says: ‘it is precisely because they detest violence that men make a duty of vengeance’ (15). Combined with the violence of Master Kent’s acolytes, this scapegoating helps undermine the community, leading to a final exodus.

Turning again to the historical origins and scapegoating, the ancient Jewish community named the banished animal Azazel’s goat, later becoming known generically as the scapegoat. Azazel’s meaning, according to Rudman (2004), has been the subject of much scholarly inquiry, but the majority of researchers concur that the name refers to a demon that dwells in the wilderness (396). Rudman (2004) also highlights the significance of deserts and wildernesses by stressing the idea that they ‘are viewed as chaotic areas’ (399), counterparts of the nature of sins. In this sense, via the symbolic transference of the community’s sins onto the goat and the casting out of the animal to the dwelling place of a demon, the demon itself becomes the recipient of others’ mischief. In *Harvest,* the villagers attempt such a transference with tragic consequences for both the scapegoats and themselves. Their actions, which are undertaken in bad faith, are visited back upon them, and as Walter comments: ‘we’ve brought these troubles on ourselves’ (122). The deviousness that subtends this subterfuge may be subtly significant, for as Flahault (2003) says: ‘Evil derives from a principle which is inherent neither in God nor man’s original nature; evil entered humanity by way of sin and the Devil’ (13). In this sense, the very horns of the goat are a subliminal, residual, yet visible reminder of the devilish origins of the fall. By this, I may define scapegoating as the practice of ascribing guilt for certain misdeeds or atrocities (sins or signs thereof) to non-responsible parties in order to evade punishment that might be inflicted because of such wrongdoing. In its ritual enactment, the act is further suggestive of a belief in the magical (an earlier form of consciousness upon which religiosity is founded), and as Cassirer (1955) insists, ‘In magic the I believes it has an instrument by which to subject all outward being and draw it into its own sphere’ (221-222). Curiously the woman of the new arrivals fascinates the village men, for as Walter reflects later: ‘But the first sight of Mistress Beldam has put me out of character. […] There is wanting in the air, and sorcery’ (56). Such underlying desire complicates the act of scapegoating, diverting the energies of the villagers and thus diminishing its potential for transference of sin, finally causing doubt and vengeance.

Girard’s notion of the transference (cited above) is a form of transfiguration and suggests that there ought to be two key advantages to a society that results from collective scapegoating. Firstly, it redirects violence from the wrongdoers to the innocent. The second benefit is that scapegoating reunites the bonds of a community that has been shaken by the sin. In this sense, the sin is a disaster that has an impact on the fabric of the society. According to Maurice Blanchot (1995), ‘The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact. It does not touch anyone in particular; “I” am not threatened by it, but spared, left aside’ (1). This is true in the case of *Harvest*, for the threat comes from the social disintegration and confusion caused by the disaster, not the disaster itself. Generally speaking, such effects depend on the nature of the catastrophe and the cultural order, for the disaster must ‘transgress the taboos that are considered the strictest in the society in question’ (Girard, 1989, 15). Consequently, the society experiences a chaotic atmosphere within its cultural order whereby every individual becomes equal to the other in terms of desires. In other words, the society breaks into rival individualistic entities, and accordingly the notion of ‘acquisitive mimesis’ (Girard et al., 2003) becomes a cultural phenomenon. Acquisitive mimesis is negative in nature, for it ‘sets members of the community against one another’ (Girard et al., 2003). They become equal in their desire, and so the hierarchical differences disappear. Such conditions require a scapegoat in order to end the confusion and therefore re-establish the differences that define and stabilise the society by striking a mutual enemy.

 In *Harvest*, the locals resort to sacrificial violence to end the confusion caused by the disaster. Ironically, they cannot appease the violence they face. In essence, they fail to anticipate all potential inherent outcomes in the scapegoating, misreading the culpability of the victims and the woman. The failure of this ritual sacrifice exacerbates the situation by allowing an even greater violence to burst forth into the village, and ultimately create a wider confrontation whose resulting forces mean that the locals leave due to fear. There is an additional aspect, explored by Cassirer (1955), who observes: ‘The sacrifice is the point not only at which the profane and the sacred touch, but at which they permeate one another indissolubly’ (227), one inter-fused into the other. Hence, any underlying human anger and vengeance that survives in the figure of the woman has the capacity to expand unexpectedly and destroy this microcosmic world rather than produce the hoped-for outcome, whereby the sacrifice results in peace and continued harmony. Rather, as Cassirer (1955) further observes, ‘the slightest deviation and omission therein [acts in terms of] depriving the sacrifice of its meaning and efficacy’ (228). Crace uses this negative element to animate the final climatic and violent scenes that tear apart the previous order, despite the community already having been doomed by the new economic plan introduced by the landowner.

**2.2. Disaster and Blaming the Other**

A sense of disaster is introduced from the very beginning of the novel, giving an impression that is similar to those derived from various news headlines related to the Twin Towers disaster of September 9th 2001. As Walter describes:

TWO TWISTS OF SMOKE at a time of year too warm for cottage fires surprise us at first light, or at least surprise those of us who’ve not been up to mischief in the dark. Our land is topped and tailed with flames. (1) [emphasis in original]

Clearly the capitalisation that distinguished the first phrase implicitly references to the events of 9/11 at the World Trade Centre; a conscious, reflexive act, doubling the meaning and signification, triggering in the reader’s memory an image that has been absorbed collectively as a traumatic moment in the history of the West (if not the wider world). The image of the smoke indicates damage and disruption both within the narrative and in the mind of the reader, for whom it acts asa *mise en abyme* as described by Dällenbach (1989). Indeed, such language helps to mediate between the reader’s personal psyche and the cultural trauma caused by the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers (Alexander et al., 2004). The image serves as a fragment of those occurrences as well as drawing attention to certain parabolic possibilities and parallelism within Crace’s narrative, linking this mythic narrative of the unspecified past with the dynamic of the contemporary real world as narrativised in the public domain. Although it has many affinities and similarities to the symbolic, the emphasis of this literary device is at one level different, for as Dällenbach (1989) indicates:

The reflexion is not a symbol, since the relationship between the literal and the metaphorical sense is *instituted*; neither is it an allegory, because the two meanings are not a priori interchangeable. It alone is neither opaque nor transparent, it exists in the form of a double meaning […]. (44) [emphasis in original]

Indeed, 9/11 can be taken as a broad symbol, but literally too as an evil attack that traumatised the West in general, and particularly American identity – that nation’s cultural psyche – thus animating the war on terrorism. Yet, ‘The tragedy is that the struggle against evil engenders further evil’, as Hans-Jürgen Wirth (2013) notes. This dynamic has further innate contradictions, as does the novel, because of partial public understanding found in the village’s community and the deep division between the different groups. This division at one level mirrors larger historical dynamics, such as terrorism and war, which are so divisive and result in appalling violence.

In the novel, the villagers have the impression that the manor house itself is on fire, and they fear they might still ‘be blamed for sleeping through’ (2), as Walter reflects. Yet, even when they begin to suspect some of their peers of burning buildings proximate to the manor house, they still consider themselves in a position where they must continue to ‘prepare excuses’ (2) so to evade any harmful consequences that those in authority might inflict upon them. The fire serves as a catalyst for a jumble of hasty, instinctive reactions, some vindictive or exuding an instinct for self-preservation, which are part of what Flahault (2003) describes as ‘the innumerable manifestations of ordinary malice which runs through everyday life and the history of all human societies […]’ (3). Additionally, such an attitudinal reaction clearly indicates a collective feeling of underlying guilt, which is a key factor in motivating the locals to react immediately but hysterically, seeking a quick resolution to the situation that unsettles them, in a community already facing the realities of ‘getting smaller’ and a ‘crop [that] proved so frugal’ (4), indicating an already ongoing economic crisis. Burning the dovecote is a violent crime that targets the authority of the village. The chaos that ensues means this community experiences what Girard (1989) calls a ‘cultural eclipse’, which describes the loss of differences that defines the social order. According to him:

Since a cultural eclipse is above all a social crisis, there is a strong tendency to explain it by social, and especially, moral causes. After all human relations disintegrate in the process and the subjects of those relations cannot be utterly innocent of this phenomenon. But, rather than blame themselves, people inevitably blame either society as a whole, which costs them nothing, or other people who seem particularly harmful for easily identifiable reasons. (14)

This Girardian scenario conforms to the processes which the village community of *Harvest* adopt during the initial crisis it faces. Therefore, the cohesiveness of the small community is shaken, creating a chaotic atmosphere whereby not only does everyone reject the perpetrators’ initial suggestion of an accident, but they also conclude that ‘No, this was done maliciously’ (13), after which they rapidly seek to avoid any punishment by finding another person to blame. This is because the ‘Institutional collapse obliterates or telescopes hierarchical and functional differences, so that everything has the same monotonous and monstrous aspect’ (Girard, 1989, 13). An example of such a negative exchange and societal malfunctioning is Walter’s suspicion of the three young men: the Derby twins (Christopher and Thomas), and Brooker Higgs. Once the locals locate the source of the second smoke, Walter says: ‘I know at once whom we should blame’ (2). He then introduces the names of the three fellows, ‘[who had] been mushrooming’ (3) during the harvest day, that of the crisis. By considering the magnitude and significance of the manor house in the lives of these villagers, the very idea of its destruction is deemed naïve, and surely perpetrated by the ‘fairy-headed’ (11) or drug-influenced youths, an act of stupidity rather than volition. Yet, Walter fails to act in any way against them, admitting ‘I hold my tongue instead’ (15), suggesting a complex set of relations between him and them. As the novel progresses, hidden conflict between Walter and the three youths begins to be revealed. An early hint of this is given by Walter, as he says: ‘the faces we know and love (as well as those I know but do not like entirely)’ (7). The parenthetical adverb ‘“entirely”’ emphasises the truth that Walter dislikes the unnamed people, connoting hatred rather than the simple dislike; especially if we understand the word ‘love’ as an antonym for malevolence. In this sense, there must be a conflict between Walter and these three youths for him to regard them with such enmity.

 I contend that this implicit antagonism is ironically triggered by Walter’s wish to coexist with other villagers and no longer be an outsider. Being a husband of one born into this closed community allows Walter, in the first place, to consider himself as part of this societal structure, and despite his distinguishing marks (he is dark-haired among blonde people, which may be read as a symbol of his social alienation) and the villagers’ initial reticence towards such outsiders, he is integrated into their network of intersecting relations. He adapts to their ways attitudinally. Describing the community and his specific relation with them, Walter explains:

Who […] would choose to make a home amongst these frowning residents? But I am now part of it and part of them. I have become a frowner, too, and I have learnt to make do with the Kingdom of close relatives, where anyone who is not blood is married to someone else who is. One family’s daughter is another’s niece, another’s aunt, and yet another’s daughter-in-law. And if you’re not a Saxton or a Derby or Higgs yourself, you have a score of relatives who are. We live in a rookery. A cousinary, let’s say. And just like rooks we have begun to sound and look the same. So many grumps, so many corn-haired blondes, so many wavy, oval beards, so many beryl eyes, so many thickset arms and legs, that no one needs to mention them, or even notice them, unless reminded by an out-of-pattern visitor like me. (21)

As a social structure, this community clearly signifies an otherness that might potentially overwhelm Walter. Their way of life is acquired, becoming a common responsibility that must be adhered to, even prompting Walter to obey at the level of common facial features. According to Blanchot (1995): ‘Responsibility, which withdraws me from my order – perhaps from all order itself – responsibility, which separates me from myself […] and reveals the other *in my place* of me, requires that I answer for absence, for passivity’ (25) [emphasis in original]. As the narrative makes clear, Walter hides behind a mask of passive conformity, yet some differential antagonism may lurk underneath, which is why he states that the two outsider men in the pillory ‘need to understand at once, I should not be numbered amongst their accusers’ (51). Hence, the effect of the superego renders an unconscious detachment of Walter’s personality, as if he automatically appears more passive. The implication is that a more authentic self and associated unconscious desires are hidden, finding themselves in constant contradiction with his outer, more conventional words and actions, but still affecting him. This pattern of layered consciousness continues throughout the novel and is evident in his narration. Additionally, his knowledge of the identity of the perpetrators of the fire creates an ironic sense when one of these younger men moves to ‘organise the hunt for those responsible’ (13), whilst implying that this can only be an act undertaken by an outsider.

It should be noted that the passage quoted above also offers a typical pattern of the language as deployed throughout the novel, where a linguistic mixture of archaic language with more modern usage is evident. In this, a quasi-biblical language dominates the grammatical structures, although clearly intertwined with contemporary words. The repetition of ideas and statements is a key convergence between the novel’s narrative and the parabolic stories that are familiar from the Bible. Such a technique not only emphasizes the particular point being made, but indicates a potentially broader and implicit meaning, allowing a delineation of objects from several different perspectives or angles. Repetition, also, evokes a poetic value that is akin to Psalm 119, a translated chapter from other canonical texts, which ‘is a text that seeks to unfold and celebrate the powers of Torah’ (Burt, 2018, 690) through its poetic form. *Harvest* uses its poetic language to remind readers of biblical poetic forms. Moreover, it implies a sacred quality lurking in the events about to unfold. However, the most significant feature of this interwoven language is centralised on collective memory, whereby the archaic language stresses British collective identity perceived from historical and more modern perspectives, thus reflecting upon contemporary issues. The phrase ‘out-of-pattern’, for example, indicates an ethnocentric possibility by conveying the idea of exclusion, which reverberates with current attitudes toward immigrants, as does several others, including ‘come out of nowhere’, ‘see these vagrants off’ (18), and even more explicitly ‘Anyway, what can you tell about a newcomer from smoke, except that he or she is wanting? Or demanding?’ (19).

Considering that the society presented in *Harvest* seems in many ways to still be a fundamentally pagan one, the phrase ‘out-of-pattern’ also evokes the foundational social structure of the given community, which in a Freudian sense is totemic exogamy. Freud (1995) argues that aboriginal tribes implemented a system of prohibition related to the totemic, through which marriage restrictions are brought into existence, preventing sexual intercourse between blood related individuals. He notes that this ‘Totemic exogamy […] appears to have been the appropriate means for preventing group incest; it thus became established and persisted long after its *raison d’être* had ceased’ (1995, 7-8) [emphasis in original]. As quoted above, women have a key role in defining the identity of the novel’s peasant society that has three totemic extended families or tribes (Saxons, Higgs and Derby). Losing connection with this significant communal element isolates the individual in question, such as with the case of the protagonist, who narrates from a marginal perspective because he is a childless widower from elsewhere, having lost the maternal connection he once had. Hence, the social significance of women does not rely simply on sexual desire, rather on the fact that they conjoin the members of this society to each other, a social interconnection which Walter never attains through sexuality alone. This is evident in his secret relationship with Mrs. Kitty Gosse, a local widow. Walter comments: ‘My feelings for widow Gosse are only physical, I have to say. I’m not sure if she and I are friends’ (94). Their correlation never transcends the libidinous into either the social or truly personal realms.

The trio of youths referenced above belong to the society naturally, but they are competitors with Walter, who is originally an outsider, and therefore is incapable of attaining such an inclusion except via positive exchanges or interests that are limited to two specific types of relationships: marriage and friendship. The brief history Walter offers of his own life provides a clear example of his belief in both:

My father was his [Master Kent’s] father’s clerk. My mother was his milk nurse. […] I do not want to say he is my brother; our stations are too different.[…] And he was friend enough to me to let me go from his direct employ when I discovered my own wife, my own Sweet Cecily[…].I told him I was in love with Cecily,[…] but also with the very crumble of this village earth. He said, ‘Then you should go and plough the earth’. This is my history. (53-54)

The death of his wife marks a severance with regard to one of these conditional bonds, which effectively prepares Walter to be a rival to the youngsters. Hence, he asserts his affinity to his master, suggesting in contrast that others are more gullible, and certainly he harbours unspoken suspicions throughout. Yet, following the implicit code of the villagers, he remains consistently silent about the culpability of the perpetrators, allowing retributive violence to be inflicted on others.

Furthermore, it seems that this exogamous factor has an impact on the number of available young women – a demographic crisis. As Walter notes, this is ‘a village dismayingly short of unmarried women’ (10). Such a deficiency causes a suppression of sexual desire, influencing the behaviour of unmarried men within the community, forcing some of them to take refuge in sexual affairs in order to satisfy their supressed erotic desire, or sublimate it through lewd gossiping. Walter reports the fusion of sexual urges and another form of procreative fecundity, the harvest itself:

The harvest teamwork allows us to be lewd. Our humour ripens as the barley falls. It’s safe to spread the gossip noisily, it’s safe to bait and goad, Who’s sharing wives? Which bearded bachelor is far too friendly with his goat? Which widower (they look at me) has dipped his thumb in someone else’s pot? [...] Nothing is beyond our bounds, when we are cutting corn. (7)

 Apparently, the fields offer the locals an uncontrolled space that appears to be safe from the authority’s intervention, allowing them to release the unsatisfied natural instincts that result from the village’s shortage of women. However, beneath such ribaldry lurk impulses that are released by the arrival of the newcomers and the woman in particular. As Bataille (1986) observes, ‘The human spirit is prey to the most astounding impulses. Man goes constantly in fear of himself. His erotic urges terrify him’ (7). The settled order is disturbed even before the fires with the arrival and distracting presence of Mr Earle, who is a stranger brought by Master Kent to draw a map of the village and the surrounding area. The fact that he does so during the villagers’ labours releases other suppressed fears, which Walter reflects on by saying the following: ‘we began to wonder what awaited these treasured neighbourhoods and to feel uneasy’ (8). Such disturbance effectively prepares the community’s men for yet another rupture, resulting in their struggle for the attention of the stranger woman and producing a rivalrous and sexually charged relationship that further undermines any sense of social cohesion.

Hidden conflicts are not only present between the members of the community but are also evident in the relations between the locals and the authorities. Such a struggle crystallises once the locals suspect that Master Kent is planning to sell the land and once they have noticed Mr Earle observing them as they work the fields. These events lead to speculations and a visceral response. Seeing him carrying a sketch of the land and counting the village’s population seems to offer further evidence of such suspicion, arousing an innate sense of the potentially disturbing, if not frightening, aspect of the authority held by Master Kent. Walter describes their reactions:

We were slow to broadcast our alarm. But we tackled our last barley stands more silently, less lewdly ˗ […] as we were being watched. […] Some of the younger men […] turned their anger on the pigeon and the rooks, and on a handful of our master’s near-white doves, which had descended on the stub and were already robbing fallen grain that, by ancient gleaning rights, should have been ours. These ‘snowy devils’, their out-of-season whiteness making them seem even more coldly pea-eyed and acquisitive than their grey and black companions, were feasting on our bread and ale, they said, and sent the children to use their slings or shower them with handful of grit or yell the thieves away, anything to evidence our tenancy […].

We shook our heads and searched our hearts, until we had persuaded ourselves that Master Kent was too good and just a man to sell our fields. He’d always taken care of us (10).

The central issue is that one of their possessions is at stake, which leads to suspicion and distrust. One might argue that such a fear resonates with Freud’s (1995) primal horde story in which he suggests that guilt is an inherited psychological construction, one that has migrated across generations from our ancestors to influence us in the present. In other words, the ancestors’ fear of both the authority and loss of parental love become a source of guilt to the next generations, curbing their desire for violating the prohibitions. Clearly, the land is the object of desire for the locals, but their fear of the authority prevents them from confronting Master Kent to seek a clarification on this matter. Instead, they express their suppressed fear violently by targeting non-totemic animals. Yet, when it comes to the white doves, the locals delegate children to do the job in order to avoid any possible punishment that might be inflicted upon them for attacking these birds owned by Master Kent. Furthermore, they resort to sacrificing the white doves linguistically by magnifying the birds’ unique characteristics culturally and physically (Girard, 1989). Notably, since Mr Earle is also protected by the same authority, the same linguistic sacrifice is evident. This is precisely the reason behind naming him Mr Quill, and later Mr Fiddle, as if calling him different names imparts to the locals a superiority over Mr Earle by which they establish at least some level of symbolic control. His limp, on the other hand, is symptomatic of his abnormal physicality, indicating ‘his undisguised deficiencies’ (8) over which the villagers muse, imagining a potential wife with whom her husband might inexpertly copulate with, if at all. All of this Walter notes in a way that is revealing. The whole episode reminds one of Bataille's (1986) observations of marriage: ‘Eroticism shows the other side of a façade of unimpeachable propriety. Behind the façade are revealed the feelings, parts of the body and the habits we are normally ashamed of’ (109), and similarly by stages the village community reveals its hidden truths and dynamics, ones that destabilise its very existence.

 Indeed, such internal conflicts that are guided by a unanimous moral code and are so strongly and fundamentally challenged, persuade the locals to search for a victim to blame from outside their social structure, an unspoken complicity in which Walter is implicated. At this point, an anonymous villager acts as an ‘informer [who] waves his hands towards the far side of the fields’ (14), where the newcomers have set their camp. This gesture draws the locals’ attention at once to the direction of the first smoke source, which signals the existence of another, extraneous social order. In essence, the locals draw a link between the smoke caused by the crisis and the first earlier column of smoke, interlinking them and creating a false coherence; a cause and effect of sorts.

 As the novel progresses, the narrative reveals that those newcomers are driven by economic pressures to settle in the village as they ‘were fugitives from sheep themselves, exiles from their own commons’ (228), and thus they are harbingers of what might occur to this community. Interestingly, the villagers ignore this aspect and miss the truth that the value of this family’s lives as human beings has been diminished already in their previous residence where once they lived and prospered, signifying the potential fate of the villagers when Master Jordan arrives to deal with the manorial lands of Master Kent as his heir. The family of strangers’ hope for prosperity in this unnamed village despite their impressions of the locals. As Tew comments ‘this community is rather imbued with resignation’ (Shaw & Aughterson, 2018, 22). These contradictory views naturally create a radical gap between the villagers and the newcomers. On the one hand, the villagers are not satisfied with the yields of their own land. On the other hand, the newcomers are desperate to look for somewhere they can restart a viable new life. Covertly, the smoke is a message: ‘It says, New neighbours have arrived; they’ve built a place; they’ve laid a hearth; they know the custom and the law. We’ll see’ (1). The repetition designates the fact they are counterparts to the locals, both having innate economic needs that must be satisfied. This can also be taken as a challenge, insistent, yet rendered by Walter as provisional, and undecided.

 The newcomers’ camp unites the locals as does the fire, and they form a violent mob. Clearly, everyone in the crowd is subjected to what Gustave Le Bon(2001) calls the ‘*psychological* *law of the mental unity of crowds’* (5) [emphasis in original]. By this, Le Bon means that each individual withdraws from his personal consciousness by following the rest of the gathering that is driven unconsciously, and thus individuals’ action in this congregation are inconsistent with their usual personal behaviour. According to Le Bon (2001): ‘The sentiments and ideas of all the persons in the gathering take one and the same direction, and their conscious personality vanishes’ (2). In effect, everyone is acting in accordance with the unreason of a collective endeavour, including the mild-mannered Master Kent who ‘understood that something out of reason had occurred and something out of reason had to put an end to it’ (30).

The mob comes to surround the newcomers’ ‘den’ (23), a word that symbolizes the dwelling of predators, or a secret place where thieves lurk, only to face two armed men in order to protect their poorly built shelter. Walter describes the confrontation:

Brooker Higgs was the first to raise his stick and strike the dwelling on its roof, expecting, with a single blow, to bring it to the ground and earn himself some cheap applause. […]

Other men stepped forward with heavier tool and would have finished the task had not, before the second blow, a pair of strangers […] stepped out of the trees with longbows raised and drawn to the ear. […] They looked […] more innocent than any of us would have liked. Their squinted eyes and furrowed foreheads said, ‘What kind of villainy is this that takes a cudgel to a poor man’s home?’ (23-24)

The sudden presence of the strangers strikes the locals, and not only because they were armed. Rather, they disturb the image originally created by the villagers’ collective imagination, which means that they – at least unconsciously – conceive of the other as an abnormal element. It appears as if the chain of reinforcement that the collective illusion previously generated and sustained has subsequently been interrupted by the newcomers’ actual, outward appearance. In other words, the locals’ constructed “Reality” clashes with the newcomers’ “reality”. To explain this in detail, it is crucial to refer to the Lacanian concept of the Real. According to Žižek (2008): ‘“Reality” is a fantasy-construction which enables us to mask the Real of our desire’ (45). Žižek stresses that constructing the fantasy is not creating a radical angle by which we observe our own reality from a far-reaching perspective, and thus escaping our reality, but rather it ‘serves as a support for our “reality” itself: an “illusion” which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel’ (Žižek, 2008). This conforms to the dynamics of perspective found in the novel, as the real kernel for the villagers lies in the radical social differences caused by the disastrous event, which have been covered in the unconscious process of blaming the newcomers.

 The locals construct their own fantasy by hunting for evidence linked to the crime scene, albeit reluctantly, and do so on the basis of seeking lowest common denominators, that is a low threshold of evidence. The first piece of evidence the villagers find is ‘Bird bones, gnawed clean’ (23), but this proves to be erroneous. The dovecote has already burnt down and the bones that have been found are those of blackbirds, yet the villagers persist in their belief that they might be remnants of the white doves. They claim rather ludicrously that ‘by a further cunning the arsonists had disguised their plunder as a blackbird’ (23), which according to Walter’s account is inflected with a presumption of guilt. Hence, the villagers continue to deceive themselves, a matter that contributes to the crowd mentality that shields them from the truth.

Such details of falsehood seem to reflect the type of lie propagated by *The* *Sun* newspaper in 2013 under the title ‘Swan Bake: asylum seekers steal Queen’s birds for barbecues’ (Shabi, 2019). This fake news accused a group of eastern European immigrants of undermining the monarch’s safety and status by eating several grilled swans in a park located in east London. Although the incident did not occur, attributing such a behaviour to foreigners adds conviction to the narrative, for such an action seems abnormal to the British, and therefore enhances the belief in the reliability of the story as a genuine report. According to Girard (1989): ‘Foreigners are incapable of respecting “real” differences; they are lacking in culture or in taste. They have difficulty in perceiving exactly what is different’ (22) and thus attract violence in their behaviours.

In fact, the *Sun* is not alone in such myth-making news about immigrants: there are multiple sources producing untrue stories and statistics, presenting immigrants and asylum seekers as an economic and criminal threat to Britain. In *Necessary Lies*, Caroline Moorehead (2004) observes the ‘Dishonest anti-immigrants’ campaigns’ carried out by the media and stresses that inaccurate news about immigrants often becomes viral, noting that ‘Untruths surround refugees’ (95). The *Daily Express*, for example, targeted immigrants from the Roma community in its title “Gypsies prepare to invade Britain” (Moorhead, 2004, 96). Such hostile rhetoric effectively inflames the general opinion against both refugees and asylum seekers, producing an illusion supported by anxiety and fear. Indeed, such an illusion is necessary to sustain the process of sacrifice. According to Girard (2013): ‘the sacrificial process requires a certain degree of *misunderstanding.* The celebrants do not and must not comprehend the true rule of the sacrificial act’ (7) [emphasis in original]. The ultimate aim of sacrifice is to direct violence against an external victim instead of the internal culprit to avoid both reprisal and the need for vengeance (although the villagers ultimately fail in terms of the latter). Thus, the novel depicts the villagers as unaware of the process of substitution of the internal culprit by those external entities; any decision being either unconscious or a matter of a space of common possibilities to adapt a phrase from Bourdieu (apart from Walter who is in essence still an outsider himself).[[16]](#footnote-17)

 In an act of bad faith, every individual succumbs to a collective thought process that visualises the newcomers as the real wrongdoers, deserving punishment for threatening the manor house. The vulnerability of those strangers attracts violence, initially preventing them from seeking vengeance (but not in any extensive manner, as Walter makes clear towards the conclusion), which contributes to the appropriation of their presence turning them into victims of scapegoating. Yet, in contradiction to what the locals expected, the physical appearance of the strangers indicates their innocence, undermining the locals’ illusion that depicts the newcomers as harmful or can be a potential threat to their existence. In essence, this implies a collective shame instead of collective guilt, and this is more frightening to the locals than the strangers’ bows. This is because the element of misunderstanding required in the process of ritual sacrifice does not apply any more, and thus the illusion of morality is exposed. In other words, the strangers’ palpable innocence demolishes the locals’ fantasy-construction, decisively disrupting the irrational collective thought, causing a temporal detachment from the crowd mentality to the individualistic consciousness, and effectively exposing the locals’ Real desire. That is, their fear of being blamed for the disaster that threatens the manor house.

Having their illusion deconstructed, the locals are threatened by the strangers’ weapons, which exacerbates the situation. As other villagers report to Walter, he says:

 The twins and Brooker Higgs no longer wished to be numbered amongst the front rank of their more aggressive neighbors,[…]. The women called their children to their sides and also backed away. The widow Gosse, I’m told, fainted. (24)

The confrontation that combines two sources of violence (the direct acts of the locals and the gestures implying threat from the strangers) generates a power vacuum resulting in a temporary cessation whereby each side becomes motionless. Having the climate charged with violence substantially prevents each party from undertaking any further step by which violence might erupt. ‘But at this moment, so I’m told, the mood was murderous. […] The day had darkened suddenly’ (25), as Walter describes the overwhelming emotions (including fear) that dominate the atmosphere of the encounter. The conflict becomes the undecided property of the two groups, whereby authoritative dominance is divided and becomes a matter of dispute. Realising this fact, ‘Master Kent dismounted from Willowjack and stood behind her’, as Walter narrates (24). Since Master Kent’s mare symbolises authority, descending from its back indicates a loss of his identification as a source of authority (Girard, 2013). In such circumstances, where each rival becomes a simulacrum to the other, violence reaches its apotheosis, demanding immediate action to curb its rage. This action is taken by Mr Earle, as he approaches the strangers empty-handed to comfort them. By doing so, he voluntarily chooses to enter this dangerous area, and being a stranger himself, the locals conceive him as a perfect scapegoat, using him as a distraction to re-establish their authority over the conflict. As Walter narrates: ‘If Mr Quill was sacrificed in their attempt, then that might be a price they could afford. He was no cottager. They hadn’t grown used to him’ (25).

Under the sway of this confrontation, two types of victims of scapegoating emerge: the newcomers and Mr Earle. To the community, the first are the outsiders and the latter comes from within (albeit only temporarily and due to his affiliation to Master Kent). Once the dovecote has been set ablaze, the community is prone to internal violence. And because the social contract that holds the community together is bound by heredity, the chance of unending reprisal is heightened drastically. Therefore, striking an outsider appears to mediate the community’s differences caused by the disaster, as they come together as one individual in attacking the enemy. Here, the newcomers absorb all the internal conflict of the society as well as the guilt of whomever has burned the facilities proximate to the manor house. Their vulnerability attracts violence, preventing them at least initially from seeking vengeance, which contributes to appropriating them as victims of scapegoating. Mr Earle, on the other hand, is the surrogate victim that might mediate the conflict between the two rivals: the locals and the strangers. According to Girard (2013): ‘The surrogate victim comes from inside the community, and the ritual victim must come from outside; otherwise the community might find it difficult to unite against it’ (102). Metaphorically speaking, the newcomers are the Azazel (the monster, the absolute evil) to this community, while Mr Earle is the goat by which the community extracts all its guilt and misdeeds to the suspects.

**2.3. The Failure of Ritual Sacrifice**

The unexpected appearance of the strange woman certainly intensifies the confrontation between the locals and the newcomers, as she has been accidentally injured by Brooker Higgs in his attempt to break the hut’s roof. Evidently, the locals were unaware of her existence when the strangers initially arrived. Apart from the local women, seeing a woman in this sacrificial crisis upsets the situation, and the gravity of the matter worsens once the locals see her injury, escalating the conflict decisively. According to Walter, ‘The whole encounter was transformed by blood, I’m told. […] The woman’s wound was too red and fresh not to take notice of’ (27). The noticeable injury unsettles the locals, triggering their primitive fear of blood, shifting their position from being attackers to become those under threat of revenge. As Cassirer (1955) explains, ‘Myth and language are inseparable and mutually condition each other. Word and name magic are, like image and magic, an integral part of the magical world view’ (40). Therefore, toward the end of the novel Walter ties all the violence, murder and destruction of property to the stranger woman, ‘encouraged with sorcery’ (272). In the earlier scene of confrontation, the sight of blood, transfigured into the naming or thought of blood, has the potential of being conjured into violence (its origin) and vengeance (the originating act’s repayment given the tragic outcome of the punishment). Regardless the superior number of locals compared to the newcomers, the blood creates a general tendency among the locals to leave aside their weapons, so ‘At once the village women began to call out for restraint’ (27), in fear of an escalation. Such effects are purely grounded in primitive man’s knowledge that women are not sacrificial objects, for as Girard (2005) indicates, sacrificing them inevitably ensues more bloodshed and an unending circle of vengeance. This unexpected emergence of the woman changes the course of the sacrifice, contributing to its failure.

To understand this failure, it is necessary to stress two key points. First: the aim of conducting a sacrifice is to avoid violent impulses through the process of substitution, which the participants must undertake in bad faith. In this regard, Naomi Janowitz (2011) notes that ‘Rituals unfold according to plan, not accident - or the accident itself will become part of the plan’ (1). This indicates that the ritual requires certain channels in order to fulfil its ultimate objective, and the celebrants must not realise these dynamics consciously. Rather, it must appear to them as if the whole process is a result of an accident. Otherwise, the system of ritual sacrifice is at risk of revealing the Real desire that must be concealed throughout the process. Consequently, the condition of misunderstanding required in the ritual of sacrifice would be shattered.

Secondly, successful sacrifice demands a certain type of victim featuring one key characteristic, which is the inability to take revenge. According to Girard (2005), ‘sacrifice is primarily an act of violence without risk of vengeance’ (13). This is because reprisal causes unending violence, which ritual sacrifice principally intends to prevent. Hence, selecting the right victim is crucially important to curb the urges of violence from overflowing the channels set by the rituals. Accordingly, as Girard details, primitive societies were extremely cautious in such a process of choosing their ritual victims, avoiding those who play roles in tying or bonding relationships, such as married women (13).

 In *Harvest*, the sudden presence of the stranger woman amidst the conflict will ultimately threaten the villagers with revenge. However, in order to avoid such an undesirable reality, the locals engage in a predominant delusion, dodging the fact that the woman is actually a wife to one of the strangers, as will be revealed towards the novel’s end, and promoting instead the illusion that she is a daughter and subject of male desire. To confirm the self-deception of the crowd while maintaining a certain subtle distance from that viewpoint, Walter reports:

She’d be, they thought, more than thirty years of age and so it was unlikely (and preferable, of course) that either of the men was her husband. The elder was already grey and balding, her father possibly […]; the other was a man at least ten years younger than the woman, but equally as black-haired as her. A brother, then. This was a family. And it was safe to say the daughter of the house was still available, despite her age. (28-29)

 Such a false distinction stems from the kinship system, through which a symbolic value creates an affinity of relationships between a group of individuals. According to Girard (2005): ‘the common basis of all kinship systems is the recognition of a firm distinction between marriage and consanguinity’ (238). Essentially, the major factor that leads the locals to this false assumption is that they compare their own kinship system with others, merely relying on the strangers’ facial characteristics to distinguish the type of relationship that ties them together. Based on this inaccurate conclusion, a collective sentiment emerges that appropriates the newcomer woman, producing what Girard (2003) calls ‘acquisitive mimesis’. According to him:

If *acquisitive mimesis* divides by leading two or more individuals to converge on one and the same object with a view to appropriating it, *conflictual mimesis* will inevitably unify by leading two or more individuals to converge on one and the same adversary that all wish to strike down. (26) [emphasis in original]

Since the function of acquisitive mimesis works as a reversal process to the conflictual mimesis that unites the community in the first place, its emergence produces a division and tears their togetherness apart again. The outsider woman invokes this type of mimesis through her Turkish velvet shawl that ‘caught our women’s eyes’ (27). Regarding the men, the woman herself is the object of erotic desire, attracting their sexual gaze. Walter’s narration makes this implication explicit: ‘But, as men will, they were assessing her by standards other than her clothes. They surveyed her, hoof, horn and tail’ (28), indicating her bestial or devilishly attractive quality, an eroticism, both thrilling and undermining. Bataille (1986) admits he ‘regarded eroticism as the disequilibrium in which the being consciously calls his own existence in question’ (31). In so losing themselves, risking their very identities (as Bataille would suggest), the bonds of the village are subtly weakened, for Bataille notes that ‘inner experience is never possible untainted by objective views, but is always bound to some or other indisputably objective consideration’ (31). In the case of *Harvest*’s villagers, this is the very survival of their community. Such a transformation from violence to erotic desire is also observed by Girard (2005), who says: ‘the shift from violence to sexuality and from sexuality to violence is easily effected’ (37). The cause of this shift is arguably due to the totemic exogamy underpinning this society, which reduces the number of chances for men to have sexual relationships with women without being prone to the violence of incest. Thus, being outside this totemic system undoubtedly grants the newcomer woman a place that is not restricted by prohibition of incest, and therefore it is safe for every man in this community to possess and objectify her. According to Walter:

The local women were like land – fenced in, assigned and spoken for, the freehold of their fathers, then their husbands, then their sons. You could not cross their boundaries, or step beyond their portion. But this one, this incomer, was no better than any other wild quarry on common ground. Like any pigeon, any hare, she was fair game. (29)

Again, such patriarchal ownership is tied to instincts toward retributive male violence, a summary justice, and sexual aggression with violence as if one were hunting prey. Therefore, by being the object of the men’s sexual desire, the stranger woman generates a crisis by which the locals’ unanimity transforms into a rivalrous conflict, in which each man becomes the simulacrum to the other. Freud (1995) notes that ‘Sexual desires do not unite men but divide them’ (144), a concept of sexual desire that overlaps Girard’s notion of acquisitive mimesis.

However, Girard is more specific than Freud, since he considers sexual desire as a need that requires fulfilment, and that desiring a particular object eventually will evoke another subject to desire the same object. This leads to a mimetic crisis in which all subjects become a double in their violence. While prohibition prevents such a crisis by avoiding mimesis, the ritual produces mimesis within a constrained environment to prevent violence from taking other directions in a form of vengeance (Girard, 2003). In *Harvest*, the community breaks the prohibition set by the ritual, ending the confrontation with the shaving of the strangers’ heads and cuffing the men to the pillory at the unbuilt church, without regard to their survival or manner of potential death.

Clearly, shaving the strangers’ heads enforces their isolation from the rest of the community by affecting their outlook through this highly visible victimisation. Furthermore, their baldness implies humiliation, which, to some extent, resembles the cloaks given to the White People in Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom* (2005), as this thesis will analyse in its fourth chapter. The similarities between the White People and the strangers are also evident in the newcomer woman. In addition to the adoption of a resistant silence, the stranger woman and the White People also share a way of travelling that eludes surveillance and capture. Once the punishment takes place, she disappears, and no one can find her. Yet, unlike the White People who are passive, the newcomer woman takes a violent act of revenge at the end of the novel by burning down both the manor house and the cottages of the villagers, which offers a final proof of the failure of the sacrifice as the villagers flee, followed by Walter.

Notably, shaven-headed women are a common feature in Crace’s novels. In an interview with Jennifer Hodgson (2012), Crace ponders that it may be the result of reading Hemingway’s (1940) *For Whom the The* *Bell Tolls* and watching Jean Seberg in (1957) *Saint Joan* and (1960) *Breathless,* while asserting his uncertainty about the genuine reason and source of such a phenomenon (51). Nicola Allen (2018) suggests that the bald woman in Crace’s novels ‘represents both victimhood, even shame, and a kind of de-feminised strength’ (116), and Crace’s depiction of the unnamed woman in *Harvest* conforms to these elements. Her shaven headedness symbolises traumatic injuries that silence her throughout the novel. Victims of trauma usually acquire such an attitude, especially those who live in a community that does not acknowledge their pain (Govier, 2015). Such a negligent treatment of victims is arguably akin on a spatial level to the paradox of the unbuilt church: the church that is there yet does not exist.

It is crucial to note that the unbuilt church is one of many allegories used in the novel by which Crace articulates the dynamic of political transition. Leo Robson (2013) argues that producing new eccentric worlds advances Crace’s ability to ‘communicate his message, [which is] usually about transition and impermanence’ (45). Clearly, Crace intentionally sets his novel in an unspecified period, though there remain hints of a time during the feudal era in order to create an exemplary model of how those with power create systems that impose a new order on people with little in the way of material possessions or influence. The dynamic of such transitions draws upon historical events that occurred in the sixteenth century; part of the process of change that effectively led Britain to modernity. Stanley Rothman in *Modernity and Tradition in Britain* (1961)defines modernity as ‘the rapid industrialization that transformed traditional societies […] in the form of liberal capitalism’ (300). Rothman (1961) notes that this political shift was set in motion the moment England rejected Rome’s authority over the church during the reign of Henry VIII, a time when Britain ‘thought of the Roman church as a foreign church’ (299). In the novel, the unbuilt church invokes such a dogma, signalling tacitly the locals’ readiness to reject both outsiders and potentially authority (the latter more troubling for those who would coerce them).

One might also argue that the depiction of the abandoned church as such seems to take inspiration from Marx (1992), who counts ‘the spoliation of the church’s property’ as one of the ‘many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation’ (895). Hence, the non-existent church hints at the authoritative ambition to transform the village’s economy. Yet, this cannot be attained without reinforcing a judicial authority by which the pillory signifies its power (in addition to its symbolism of humiliation and shame by exposing the individual to the others’ gaze). In the novel, the judicial power has not been used since the dispute between two Saxton men over the pig’s ownership. Indeed, pigs have the potential to create conflict between members of the society because of their importance to the villagers, as Walter narrates: ‘Pigs are our backyard brethren, in a way, and worth fighting for’ (35). The community intervenes with the intention of separating the two men in order to stop this internal conflict from spreading, tying them to the pillory for one day. According to Walter: ‘The cousins spent only a night encased, as I remember it, and by the morning they had butchered their differences. They shared the pork out, snout to tail, two trotters each, weighing everything and even dividing the liver and heart [...]’ (35). This example indicates where the legal punishment stops and the purging phase begins, since Master Kent ‘never thought it fit to put the pillory to use since then’ (36). Essentially, the punitive measure does not restore the natural harmony between the two rivals, but sacrificing an animal does. However, the key importance of this retrospectively recollected episode centres on the phrase ‘butchered their differences’, which conveys a notion of transference that is associated with the original crime (as well as the desire of the victorious brothers to diminish each other) and devouring the victim’s flesh. The conflict between the two members is a violation of the totemic bond that ties them together and sacrificing the totem animal re-establishes this bond. Hence, Master Kent reimposes judicial power by reclaiming the use of the pillory for punishing the strangers.

**2.4. The Birth of a New Creed**

During the night that follows the collective crime, the locals congregate to celebrate their harvest. Master Kent takes this ceremonial event as an opportunity to present his plan to reform the village’s economy, ‘a dream which makes us rich and leisurely. Every day becomes a day of rest of us’ (41). Yet Master Kent shows a clear reluctance in naming the core component of this economic transition throughout his speech, which is alluded to with the introduction of the term ‘shepherding’ (41). Walter comments: ‘And still he has not said it: Sheep. Am I the only one to recognise what the dream is trying to disguise? The sheaf is giving way to sheep’ (42). Such a pompous, roundabout speech indicates a frightening element that is not fully articulated but hinted at with reference to ‘our fenced-in field’ (41). Master Kent’s strategy of verbal avoidance and diminishment represents a ‘linguistic scapegoat’ (Girard, 1989, 4), by which people tend to avoid uttering words ascribed to uncontrollable phenomena, for they are considered taboo.[[17]](#footnote-18) Thus, dodging the taboo by not saying its name is a way of coping with the social function. Nonetheless, Walter manages to predict the key missing elements and vocabulary. He also anticipates its negative consequences upon the village, which he describes briefly before the speech in narrative terms, despite its being an unprecedented strategy:

 The *organization to all of our advantages* that the Master has in mind […] involves the closing and engrossment of our fields with walls and hedges, ditches, gates. He means to throw a halter round our lives. He means the clearing of our common land. […] He means this village, far from everywhere, which has always been a place of horn, corn and trotter and little else, is destined to become a provisioner of wool. (40) [emphasis in original]

As we have seen from Marx’s critique of the enclosure movement, the capitalist reform to the economy of this traditional rural community and its negative social consequences is a product of such a political prism. In an interview with Hodgson (2012), Crace says:

‘I think that the puritanical side of me, if I’d even imagined aged seventeen the kind of writing I would do in the future, it would have been leafleteering. It would have been banner-waving writing, in which the politics were not timid or obscure, in which the message was quite clear. Whereas in the kind of writing I’ve ended up doing, it’s clear there’s politics in there, but my books aren’t placards. If anything they don’t close down on a slogan, they open out’. (5)

In *Harvest*, the political message is delivered indirectly and, allegorically, which conveys a broader political stance that echoes the author’s predisposition towards a neo-Marxist mindset (Hodgson, 2012). Indeed, using allegories is a common Marxist trait by which authors with such a socialist political affiliation tend to express a certain experience through a unique lens (Cowan, 1981) such as with the animals in *Harvest*. However, the novel does not apply such as anthropomorphistic device, as in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1954). Rather, the biblical language serves to camouflage this otherwise dominant political message. For instance, Walter narrates: ‘An ox won’t know he’s needed for draught work until the moment that he has to pull – and even then he can’t be bothered to protest’ (223). It is clear that the ox here represents the local men, who perform their duty like a beast that operates according to commands, much as machines will do later in the historical cycle. The same allegory manifests in the Bible, in Corinthians: ‘“For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned”’ (1st Cor 9:9). Such symbolism is applicable to sheep, as in Psalm 78:52 ESV: ‘Then he led out his people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock’. On the same level, sheep in the novel are arguably a symbolic evocation of immigrants, since Walter describes them as ‘the far-off bleating of incoming animals that are neither cows nor pigs nor goats, that are not our brethren’ (40), which highlights the covert ethnocentric aspect of the novel.

 In a British political context, this depiction of sheep embodies the description of immigrants as ‘“flocking” into Britain’ by a woman addressing the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown in 2011 (Shabi, 2019). One of the main concerns underpinning such a view is that immigrants constitute an economic threat, if not a criminal one; more particularly, those coming from EU countries (Stansfield & Stone, 2018) (see also, Moorhead, 2004). Regarding the latter, the Turkish velvet shawl of the stranger woman is arguably a telling signifier. Such a stereotypical position against immigrants is at the heart of various petitions protesting the government’s policy that allows migrants to enter, culminating in the Brexit Referendum. In fact, the novel hints towards such petitions when the villagers request clarification on the disappearance of their sons and daughters, which seems to reflect the oft-repeated claim that migrants are damaging job security in the UK. Walter asserts that ‘We’re the majority, they protest. We must be listened to. I hear the word *petition*’ (145) [emphasis in original], which explains Master Kent’s hesitancy and fear from pronouncing the word ‘sheep’ in the first place.

Indeed, such a revelation exacerbates the community’s melancholy as the collective crime has already left a stigma on the locals, initiating a sense of hopelessness. The effect of this is easy to detect: a collective discomfort and malaise that Walter observes at the beginning of the feast. Walter reflects that despite the feast ‘I can tell our village is unnerved’ (33). Moreover, according to Walter’s further narrative revelations of the underlying dynamics:

To tell the truth there’s none of us who feels entirely comfortable, who is not soiled with a smudge of shame. […] We can be absolved only if these three guilty friends pin their valour to their chests and whisper in the master’s ear that the two so far nameless men who are now standing side by side, cuffed, collared and locked in the village pillory at the gateway to the church we never built, enduring the first chill of the evening and a little rain, should be set loose and brought into the barn by way of an apology. (33)

 The juxtaposition of revelry (that of the villagers’) and the impending abjection (and even worse) of the outsiders is ironic, compelling and reveals of the underlying truth. As the narrative makes clear, the collective murder already undermines the purpose of this gathering, even if it is dismissed at the time. Walter serves as the community’s conscience, or at least its nagging doubt. Whereas the celebration ought to evoke prosperity and happiness, such a sense of shame limits their impulse toward enjoyment and introduces unconscious feelings of disgust towards themselves.

Rupert Brown (2008), in his discussion of collective guilt and shame, notes that while guilt is specifically a behaviourally focused reaction and can motivate wrongdoers to atone for their misdeeds, collective shame has more to do with the image associated with a group. Therefore, if one group persecutes an individual or another group, the consequence comes in a form of shared disgust, for the transgression has exposed the reality of their nature. Such an image is acquired by the locals during the violent encounter. Even though the locals recognise the innocence of their victims, they become increasingly vicious and ever more persistent in hiding their actual feelings. In the social order this may well be a natural, if narcissistic collective tendency, for as Flahault (2003) observes: ‘It is pleasant for us to imagine that we are the masters of our actions, especially when they correspond to the ideas we profess. As a result, we overvalue the importance of the existential fabric which supports our way of being and behaving’ (166). This explains the curiously self-justifying and tortuous logic of the villagers’ accusations. Both fires and the newcomers are challenges to this apparent stability. Walter, who because of his injured hand was left in the village, retells the encounter vicariously:

 So earlier this evening it was for me an unhappy and infernal sight to see the two men and their hanging heads and hands, secured to the village cross and left to sag for seven days. Up till that moment I’d witnessed only their smoke and heard about the newcomers, their defiance and their bows, through the vaunting, colourful reports of my brave neighbours, mostly John Carr and Emma Carr and the widow Gosse, with whom, in all honesty, I have of late established an occasional attachment. From her nettling description, I was expecting rougher men. (38)

Walter’s description is not the product of the irrational behaviour associated with the crowd; he does though reflect the cognitive distortion that the villagers succumb to during their confrontation with the new arrivals. Moreover, Walter’s words imply a gap between rhetoric and reality, which illustrates the collective tendency to escape shame by distorting the description of these newcomers, in effect a preparation for them to be regarded as punishable.

In addition to the stigma associated with the villagers’ self-image, there is a moral shame emanating from the contradiction at the heart of the locals’ collective behaviour. This voids any residual claim to morality and values of decency. Describing the essential and foundational moral values of the villagers’, which, ironically, they have abandoned, Walter insists that ‘We’re not a hurtful people, hereabouts’ (17). Despite this seemingly agreed virtue, the confrontation has ended with subjective violence, a contradictory result that has left a traumatic imprint on the collective memory, haunting the locals during the later gathering.According to Alexander (2013):

 Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. (13)

Indeed, such a neurotic symptom is acknowledged by Girard (1989, 13) as part of the negative exchange rendered by the cultural crisis. The music and drink provided in the gathering help to hide this traumatic injury temporally, suppressing any guilt and providing the villagers with momentary relief from psychological pain. Since Master Kent is the provider of ale and veal, and the one who brought in the fiddler, Mr Earle, it appears that those in authority are attempting to distract the locals from questioning or reflecting too closely upon his economic proposal. In a curious sense, the two activities, both the mapping and the celebration, might be regarded as interrelated. Walter says: ‘Mr Quill the fiddler is shaping us again, making us as congruous and geometrical with his melodies as he has done with his charts and ink’ (44). By implication, the locals are drawn in or seduced into accepting the economic reform without realising its ramifications.

Yet once the stranger woman exposes herself to locals during the harvest’s gathering, she disturbs the collectively recognised balance by which the locals differentiate between controlled and chaotic areas. While the inhabited area of the village is collectively perceived as a controlled zone, the wood holds within its boundaries a potential destructive force that keeps everyone away, especially during the night. Simply put, a chaotic area is an appropriate dwelling for radical evils. Flahault (2003) notes that ‘Satan arises out of chaos; he exerts the seductiveness of what is limitless, he transgresses all boundaries, all limits, he is a power of the night which, unnoticed, creeps into souls’ (25). The woman also does not reveal herself fully, evoking a sense of both familiarity and unfamiliarity, as Walter comments:

She’s hardly visible. She’s little more than dark on dark, a body shape. [...] she is a spectre summoned up by ale and dance. […]

We know we ought to make amends for shearing her. That’s why she’s standing there, awaiting us. She’s asking us to witness what we’ve done. (45-46)

 Such a description reveals an uncanny symmetry that penetrates the locals’ consciousness, leaving them to experience a terrifying moment.[[18]](#footnote-19) According to Freud (cited in Sandner, 2004):

 The subject of the “uncanny” is [...] undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror; it is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread. (75)

Her spectral presence, as a result, brings back the unwanted feeling, disturbs the villagers’ attempt to escape their shame, leaving them with ‘*sheepish* glances’ (47) [emphasis in original], becoming so much like the creatures by whom they will be displaced. The moment has impacted upon the locals as if the incomer woman is the living embodiment of the stains of shame that are profoundly located in their collective memory, forcing them to stop the music. Describing the profound impact of this encounter upon the villagers, Walter recollects: ‘We were liquid; now we’re stones’ (46). This is a momentous transformation because even those who have not participated in the original violence of the crowd have improvised the same reaction, and hence they inherit the collective trauma and associated subliminal guilt vicariously. Walter comments on the intruder’s wordless departure: ‘We cannot dance. We bid each other uncomfortable good nights, and hurry home to sleep the evening off, or lay awake, or worse’ (47). This general feeling of uneasiness, or malaise, indicates trauma, and as Alexander (2013) notes: ‘Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity’ (19). Clearly, the unnamed woman produces a traumatic temporal liminal experience, whereby the past and present come together. This trauma is directly related to collective shame by being exposed to the specular of the other.

According to Ruth Leys (2007), ‘shame is identical to exposure, the feeling of shame is one of *already having been exposed* to the gaze of some real or fantasized other’ (134) [emphasis in original]. The woman’s appearance seems chaotic, but the event imparts for Master Kent a sense of control since the unexpected allows him to name the woman and exert a curious authority.[[19]](#footnote-20) Walter reflects that ‘“It’s Mistress Beldam,” Master Kent mutters to me, giving her a name I know will stick. Beldam, the sorceress. Belle Dame, the beautiful’ (45). Clearly, the name juxtaposes two radically distinct meanings by which this society perceive the woman, designated as both fearful and desirable. Walter has already reflected on his departure from the feast in what is a libidinal wish-fullness, one that mirrors the mood of the other men, admitting: ‘I hope – like everyone – to find the woman when I leave’ (47).

 In her book, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Tori Moi (1988) highlights this issue of renaming someone, as she argues: ‘To impose names is, then, not only an act of power [...] it also reveals a desire to regulate and organise reality according to well-defined categories’ (160). Master Kent’s act conforms to such regulatory impulses, but his decision may be regarded as ambivalent. The erotic element here also acts to undermine authority. Naming the Beldam woman as such exposes one category through which Master Kent conceives the woman, specifically, as a sexual object. Indeed, beauty has an affinity with sexual desire; the driving motor by which such a patriarchal society appropriates any residual power inherent in a woman. This is evident in Walter’s description of the Beldam woman as she fades from the locals’ sight into the woods, ‘At the movement of the dancers, their lifting hands, the woman backs away, still facing us, not trusting us perhaps. She must know that if she hesitates the men will swarm round her like a cloud of gnats’ (46). Nevertheless, the depiction of the Beldam woman indicates their belief that instinctually her erotic promise might offer an avenue whereby they might resist all such the feared coercion and symbolic imposition of a new scheme of life embodied in the mapping process. Master Kent may have unconsciously employed a strategy of power and control outlined by Marcuse (1974):

Such release of sexuality provides a periodically necessary outlet for unbearable frustration; it strengthens rather than weakens the roots of instinctual constraint; consequently, it has been used time and again as a prop for suppressive regimes (203).

In essence, such excess drives the young men and in a vicarious fashion its sublimation with narcotic mushrooms causes the fire. Such libidinal excess seems common amongst this group of men, affecting even Walter, and such longings are projected onto the figure of the unknown woman. In any case, the villagers are frustrated in their desire for Mistress Beldam: she becomes untouchable, refusing to satisfy men’s erotic desire, and by implication, renounces all coercive phallocentric attempts aiming for sexual consumption.

One could also argue that this woman, whom the villagers have harmed during their encounter with the strangers, becomes a *taboo* object preserving the sacred power engendered by this disastrous encounter*.* According to Freud (1995) ‘anything that is uncanny or provokes dread for any reason becomes subject to taboo’ (23). In addition, by juxtaposing both the pure (beauty/desirable/aesthetic) and profane (fear/ undesirable demonic being/ mystic) in one figure gives credence to such a claim. This combination of distinct features, as Freud (1995) notes, invokes an ambivalent attitude towards taboo objects, and he links such ambivalence to the structure of human psyche. On the one hand, it is innately grounded and thus unconsciously desirable. On the other hand, it is externally constructed and therefore consciously prohibited. The Beldam woman has the same influence upon the villagers. Freud (1995) is right when he observes: ‘the objects of the [taboo’s] venerations turn into objects of horror’ (25). The Beldam woman’s beauty, mainly concentrated on her hair as the cause of desire, triggers the men’s sexual wish, while her baldness radiates fear among the villagers, repressing their instinctive desire.

The synchronisation of both the emergence of the Beldam woman and the economic reform effectively allows the locals to relate the two major events to each other, and thus they deduce that the victim has a sort of devilish control over the village. This is evident as the novel progresses. According to Walter:

Whose version of events should I believe? The loudest voices that I overhear are decided – as am I, reluctantly – that the shaven, black-haired woman is behind it all. A dozen different stories hold Mistress Beldam responsible for all the disarrangement of their cottages – and then for every odour that’s not pleasing, for every jug of curdled milk, for every darkening of cloud. And she will take the blame, I know, for driving sheep into our fields. Everything’s uncertain and unhinged because of her. She’s brought a curse on to our land, she’s blighted us. (139)

It is important to note that these accusations come after the death of Master Kent’s mare Willowjack. The emphasis on the woman’s hair indicates the unique characteristic by which she is distinguishable from all the others, in this social order, a cultural and genetic difference. In other words, her baldness works as a further sign of physical disability that does not harmonise with the society, and thus not only attracts violence, but also become a reference point for selecting other future victims. Hence, the significance of the new creed is centred on introducing the new prohibition projected onto Mistress Beldam. Specifically, her victimisation is a bedrock for persecution that is legally justified. Girard (1989) differentiates the types of collective persecution as follows:

 By collective persecutions I mean acts of violence committed directly by a mob of murderers such as the persecution of the Jews during the Black Death. By collective resonances of persecutions I mean acts of violence, such as witch-hunts, that are legal in form but stimulated by the extremes of public opinion. (12)

The first type is evident in the act of scapegoating the outsiders. The second type, takes place once Master Jordan and his crew come to the village, accusing local women and a girl of witchcraft, and thereby ‘tormenting’ (159) them. In essence, the first paves the way to the legal form of persecution that follows, whereby the possible trajectory of accusation is rationalised by signs and symbols that have been engendered by the initial persecution, as the second section of this chapter seeks to explore.

**2.5. The Politics of Terror**

Once the villagers return to their cottages, Master Kent asks Walter to find the Beldam woman. Reflecting on his master’s request, Walter says:

Yet, having now seen the woman for myself and then observed the wisting in my master’s eye, I understand what outcome he must fear for her; what he admits to in himself, indeed; what I have felt and still am feeling; what every man amongst us – even brave and bloodless Mr Quill – will be dreaming of tonight. (47-48)

Such a prediction reveals Walter’s narcissistic personality, not realising that Master Kent’s eyes only convey his own reflection and desire, an ‘imaginary identification’, as Žižek (2008) notes. According to him, it is ‘the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing “what we would like to be”’ (116). This narcissistic personality confers upon Walter’s narration a sense of unreliability, blurring the liminal boundaries between truth and fantasy. This is evident in his attitudes and reactions, which indicate an embedded deeper anxiety.

Once Walter arrives at the pillory, where the two strangers are tethered, his sentiment towards the newcomer’s punishment shows a clear discrepancy: it goes from being indifferent to their circumstance to being sympathetic. He observes the strangers from fairly close distance, where he can see the outline of their figures, ‘enjoying what must be a further penalty for them, the unrelenting rain’ (50). However, as soon as he sees them more clearly, this surplus enjoyment fades away and there emerges a feeling of remorse. According to Walter:

This morning I persuaded myself that probably it’s wise for all of us to hold our tongues for the time being and let these newcomers soak up the blame. But now, beneath these weighty clouds, I recognise my foolishness; no, let us name it as it is, my lack of courage and of honesty. (51)

Such an alteration in Walter’s perception suggests a moral conflict, which is stimulated by being exposed to the suffering of the strangers, indicating a feeling of shame manifested in his self-loathing. Clearly, he finds himself in a challenging position where his long-held values and beliefs clash with a sense of remorse on observing the condition of these victims. Walter is aware of the gap between these two sets of values, since he wishes to have the church gate built and to ‘make it arch above the pillory’ (51), as if the existence of the church would eliminate such social differences. Furthermore, there is a guilt aspect apparent in Walter’s reaction. Addressing the strangers, he asserts that ‘“I was not there, this morning, when you drew your bows,” I say. They need to understand at once, I should not be numbered amongst their accusers’ (51). Such an insistence denotes that Walter has entered another sphere, animated by a moral code inconsistent with the predominant code followed by the villagers to which he has previously adhered despite his doubts. This transgression engenders an inward experience of guilt and shame. As according to Molendijk, Kramer and Verweij (2018), ‘violation of the “moral code” can result in profound feelings of shame and guilt’ (40), which are key symptoms of moral injury; the experience of losing trust in the self and the entire system.

After what seems to be a vigorous attempt to help the father stand more securely, Walter abandons the pillory to continue his mission, reflecting: ‘Short of laying on the sodden ground myself and having him stand on my back, there’s nothing I can do for him before tomorrow’ (53). He then promises himself that he will aid this victim the next day. As soon as Walter leaves, the original moral code is reasserted and dominates, and he recalls his affinity with and duty toward Master Kent. Walter ponders: ‘It is only now I can address myself to Mistress Beldam, and Master Kent’s request, instruction actually […]. I have seldom disappointed him before. I take great pride in that’ (53). However, Walter’s empathy towards the strangers vanishes during the Gleaning Day, a gathering where the locals mark a new season. This may be seen as being influenced with Master Kent’s influence and authority, and his former master reports to Walter the threats and curses of the younger stranger as he rode past the pillory early in the morning. Reflecting on this, Walter says: ‘It’s just as well, I suppose, that I haven’t yet succeeded in alleviating the short one’s punishment by dragging up a log or stone for him to stand on. The men are proving insolent’ (70). Apparently, the transformation of Walter’s judgement is guided by the space in which he finds himself by those around him, meaning that each geographical region has its own intrinsic value by which a unique set of morals is sustained and communicated symbolically by being projected by others.

Perhaps, Walter’s mission to guide Mr Earle to the village’s landmarks offers a clearer picture of the impact of such a moral collision upon the individual’s behaviour. As they approach to the abandoned church, Walter starts to experience an emotional disturbance for being close to where the strangers suffer. Imbued with guilt and shame, Walter says:

I feel uneasy, suddenly. Disloyal. Indeed, I’m doing what I can to not catch sight of the wooden pillory. And I succeed. Or I succeed until we have very nearly reached the orchard where the lane-grass is bouldered with fallen fruits. I start to kick the largest apples down the path. I’m in a restive mood, of course. And with good cause. (83)

The language of this segment not only presents the volume of the psychological pain Walter endures, but through its style (fragmentary sentences) it articulates a profound disorientation due to moral injury. Indeed, cognitive distortion is a sign of guilt in itself (Molendijk et al., 2018), thus individuals who suffer moral injury tend to assign responsibility to themselves and/or others: in Walter’s case, the apples take the blame. Clearly, there is a strong connotation here with Adam and the forbidden tree associated with apples, and Marx (1992) uses this tableau as a metaphor for the sixteenth century economic transformation, ‘This primitive accumulation plays approximately the same role in political economy as original sin in theology. Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race’ (873). In other words, the majority are suffering economically because of the process of justified condemnation of common labour. The death of the crucified man, which is discovered at this point in the narrative, reinforces the religious overtones, offering in total a blend of the two most prominent Christian victimisations in one tableau.

As Walter and Mr Earl approach the pillory, the latter ‘has spotted Master Kent. […] He’s circling the cross and talking loudly to himself. His voice is splintered and alarmed. He’s rocking to and fro in the saddle, beating his thighs with his fists’ (83). These reactions appear to be related to the death of the old man and express a state of shock and possibly fearful anticipation. This event marks a transitional point in the villagers’ life, as Master Kent decides to move the body to the manor’s courtyard. By doing so, Master Kent incorporates the two distinguishable moral areas, allowing a symbol of shame to resonate within the villagers’ boundary. According to Walter:

I’m not the only one who will blame himself, and will have good cause to blame himself. As soon as we established the body on the porch bench this afternoon and were standing back, shamed and bloodied by our efforts and not daring yet to turn face the mounted visitors, I saw the looks on Master Kent’s and Mr Quill’s faces. A player in the theatre could not devise a greater exhibition of guilt. (87)

 Such a reaction indicates a moral struggle because of the traumatic experience the three men experience collectively at the pillory. Clearly, the arrival of Master Jordan and his crew effectively heightens this internal conflict or even act as a catalyst for its emergence from their unconscious minds. This is because he and his acolytes represent a moral code distinct from that of Master Kent and the villagers. Although Master Kent is the chief of the village, the superiority of this moral code overwhelms him, given that, once inside and ignoring his account of the pillory ‘his cousin is expressing his dismay that what was evidently once a fine manor house has ended up “as shabby and threadbare as a beggar’s sack”’ (88). Such dominance emerges once the heir and his band arrive. As Walter has said earlier: ‘they descended through our lanes and ways without encountering a working hand. I think Master Jordan must have counted on something busier and grander. Certainly he was dressed for that’ (84). While the clothes suggest authority, manoeuvring the villagers implicitly indicates the ability to control the society, marking the emergence of a new social layer that can initiate a mode of production, the first brick in the capitalist economic structure as it were. Soon this matter becomes more explicit in a secret meeting held in the manor house, when Walter, who decides to spy, discovers Master Jordan’s version of ‘progress and prosperity’ (99). Walter records:

The cousin’s version, though, was not so tender on the ear. There was no regret. He did not have a dream in which we ‘friends and neighbours’ were made rich and leisurely […]. I think he judges us rich and leisurely enough already. No, Master Jordan only has a scheme, a ‘simple quest’, for a tidier pattern of living hereabouts which would assure a profit for those ‒ he means himself ‒ who have ‘the foresight’. (100)

This segment indicates an underlying difference between the villagers and Master Jordan, which is confirmed by the absence of remorse in the latter. His attitude conforms to Marx’s (1992) description of the sixteenth century’s new overlords, since he says: ‘The new nobility was the child of its time, for which money was the power of all powers. Transformation of arable land into sheep-walks was, therefore, its slogan’ (879). This essentially means that greed is the core value of these men and women, which guides them to achieve their financial aims regardless of the negative consequences that may result for the majority. Equally, however, they react towards the concerns of the common people indifferently. Master Jordan’s response to Master Kent’s report of the newcomers not only offers a clear picture of such apathetic behaviour, but also shows his eagerness to impose control by taking charge of events. In a striking similarity to the novel, Marx (1992) maps out the process of initiating such a primitive accumulation, when he says:

The industrial capitalists, these new potentates, had on their part not only to displace the guild masters of handicrafts, but also the feudal lords, who were in possession of the sources of wealth. In this respect, the rise of the industrial capitalists appears as the fruit of a victorious struggle both against feudal power and its disgusting prerogatives, and against the guilds, and the fetters by which the latter restricted the free development of production and the free exploitation of man by man. The knights of industry, however, only succeeded in supplanting the knights of the sword by making use of events in which they had played no part whatsoever. (875)

In the same manner, Master Jordan finds the death of Willowjack to be an opportunity to impose his power upon the locals by setting out a proxy campaign of intervention and coercion. His three sidemen, the gendarmes of the new system, lead this campaign of thuggery. Following Master Jordan’s instructions, they subject the majority to the extremist form of violence, putting into action the Girardian notion of ‘collective resonance of persecution’. Indeed, the death of Willowjack not only signifies the demolishing of the former structure of authority, but also establishes the first indicator – or stereotype (Girard, 1989) – of persecution. In proposing these stereotypes, Girard’s (1989) interest is not to highlight ‘the causes of this belief [the responsibility of the victim] such as the unconscious desires described by psychoanalysts, or the Marxist concept of the secret will to oppress’ (15). Rather, his focus is on the procedure of transferring guilt to the victim, which in his view forms a system in its own. The crisis represents the first stereotype whereby ‘an extreme loss of social order’ (Girard, 1989, 12) is palpably evident. This indicator is apparent once the locals discover the burning of the dovecote, since the collective reaction demonstrates both a social separation and fundamental malaise. The same indication of social disintegration is obvious in the mare’s death after which every individual seeks to escape guilt. Indeed, the mare’s connection with Master Kent denotes it as a locus in the second law of totemistic prohibition, a matter recognised by the locals, as Walter asserts it would require: ‘wicked pluck to hammer Willowjack, a horse that everybody loved’ (107). Hence, the social collapse is due to the significance of the taboo that has been transgressed. Importantly, in both cases (Willowjack and the white doves), the element of unanimity is missing, which is a key factor by which a sacrifice can be distinguished from a crime (Girard, 2005) (See also Freud, 1995). For example, the harvest ceremonial gathering is a ritual sacrifice, allowing the community to eat the totemic animal, the calf. Since domestic animals (cows, pigs, goats) are treated as members of this primitive society (40), killing them is a crime, unless the whole society comes and strikes the animal as one individual. By doing so, the community not only repeats the original crime, but also divides the responsibility of murdering the animal between all members (Freud, 1995, 137). Following the killing, sharing the flesh of the totemic animal effectively reasserts the sacred bond between the participants (Freud, 1995, 134). In the novel, the whole community congregates to celebrate their harvest: ‘There’s not a soul who’s stayed behind at home tonight’ (32). In addition, eating from the calf’s flesh establishes a form of cohesiveness between the villagers, a ‘fellowship’ (34) in Walter’s words. Hence, the key importance of unanimity is due to the guilt engendering because of killing the victim, otherwise it will destabilise the society.

This is evident in the mare’s death, as Abel’s camp becomes the locals’ ultimate desire. However, the local’s determination to find a person to condemn or blame is not motivated by any factors relevant to the incident. Instead, they rely on interpersonal conflicts. For instance, Anne Roger’s attempts to persuade both Walter and Kitty Gosse to suspect Abel Saxton, the village blacksmith, ‘a man she once set her heart upon ‒ until he married. Then he was despised.’ (106), Walter asserts. However, the range of accusation has expanded to include every member from the society since: ‘there are more than sixty sons and daughters of Cain who might have crept back to their cot last night with horse blood on their hands and clothes’ (110). Such a suspicion indicates the loss of control over escalating violence and misrule, allowing guilt to creep into the soul of each member of the society.

 In order to curb this violence, Master Jordan sets a curfew upon the locals (since every individual becomes contagious due to the internal spread of violence) and launches an intensive investigation, as indicated above, in the manner of a medieval inquisition, accusing a number of local women of being witches undertaking sorcery.[[20]](#footnote-21) The shift of the accusatory vocabulary and framework indicates the second stereotype of scapegoating, reregulating social relations that have been shaken by the crisis. According to Girard (1989): ‘In order to blame victims for the loss of distinctions resulting from the crisis, they are accused of crimes that eliminate distinction. But in actuality they are identified as victims for persecution because they bear the signs of victims’ (21). Such a transformation in the manner of accusation is observed earlier in the novel, precisely when Master Kent charges the strangers of being suspicious travellers rather than arsonists. In the same manner, the local women are accused of a stereotypical crime that has no relation to the crisis. Instead, it derives from the new creed, which adds to the indictment a sense of underlying logic, imbued with intention and culpability (and therefore guilt). For as Douglas (1984) reflects: ‘Sorcery is another matter. As a form of harmful power which makes use of spells, words, actions and physical materials, it can only be used consciously and deliberately’ (108). A belief in sorcery entails a concomitant belief in the perpetrator’s guilt, and so it is an effective accusation for Master Jordan to level, playing as it does on the superstitions of others and their underlying fears.

The persecution of the local women based on such an allegation smooths the path for the economic transition that Master Jordan commits to initiate. Such a depiction draws parallels with Silvia Federici’s (2018) work, *Witches, Witch-hunting, and Women*, in which she traces the underlying motivation of witch hunting and its relationship with the enclosure of both the English lands and female body, since she says:

women were the main target of this persecution, because it was they who were most severely impoverished by the capitalization of economic life, and because the regulation of women’s sexuality and reproductive capacity was condition for construction of more stringent form of social control. (2)

Clearly, it is difficult to separate one cause from the other because the disintegration of the social network is a key factor in both of cases. This links to the outcome in the novel once the local women are seized. As Walter narrates, ‘Our snug and tiresome village has burst apart these last few days, Master Havoc and Lady Pandemonium have already set to work’ (157-158). Walter concludes from Master Kent’s guilt that the women have been sexually abused while held in custody (160). Thus, they are powerless and socially excluded women, just the kind more likely to be accused of witchcraft, which leads the analysis to the third stereotype of persecution, namely, victim selection.

The new system chooses three victims: Anne Rogers, Kitty Gosse, and little Lizzie Carr, a young girl that has been chosen by Mr Earl to be Gleaning Queen as an annual custom followed by the village to crown a local woman in the Gleaning Day. Although arbitrariness is a key quality in selecting scapegoats, these particular victims attract violence because of the possession of certain properties that are considered abnormal by the majority, and thus the chance to draw a connection between them and the crime in question is multiplied (Girard, 1989). For example, the existence of Lizzie Carr outside the barn signals her social exclusion, giving an impression of her willingness to resist the authority’s will to curfew the villagers. Furthermore, her expensive-looking sash draws the attention of Master Jordan’s men to the possibility of its connection with Mistress Beldam’s shawl, which was found soaked with blood after the mare’s death. Hence, the signs of the victims include both behavioural and physical abnormalities. According to Federici (2018): ‘The ‘witch’ was a woman of ‘ill repute,’ […] and her demeanor contradicted the model of femininity that through the law, the pulpit, and the reorganisation of the family was imposed on the female population of Europe during this period’ (19). And in the case of Lizzie Carr, Kitty Gosse and Anne Rogers certain similar elements signal a discernible pattern of abnormality to the sidemen. And while being a widow signifies Gosse’s social exclusion, her friendship with Anne Rogers excludes the later from full integration in the community. Moreover, they both have the capacity to challenge authority, as shown in the following narration by Walter:

Anne Rogers is the fiery sort, I know. It’s never wise to disagree with her, even if you’re family. And Kitty Gosse is mulish when she wants to be. If they were working at the entry of the barn, in plain sight of the lane, and witnessed Lizzie being taken off by these three coarse stony men […] I can’t imagine them standing aside. I can imagine, though, a tug of war between the women and the men […]. (141)

This persecution of local women not only shows the authority’s ambition to establish its power, but also illustrates its core policy that is influenced by misogynists who fear the power of women (Federici, 2018). Indeed, Douglas (1984) describes in more elemental societies how those in authority are prone to use accusations to control women as a collective social presence and coerce troublesome individuals: ‘When such unhappy or angry interstitial persons are accused of witchcraft it is like a warning to bring their rebellious feelings into line with their correct situation. […] [T]he accusation being a means of exerting control where practical forms of control are difficult’ (103). Thus, Master Jordan enforces this policy by his sidemen, whose moral code is precisely based on camaraderie, a fact emphasised simply by their ‘undistinguishable’ (111) outfits. They form the violent apparatus of a new system by which each member of the society is prone to its brutality, leading them to leave the village eventually to join the market; a scene that declares the total transformation from Gemeinschaft to Gesselleschaft.

In conclusion, this chapter has examined victims of scapegoating in Crace’s *Harvest*, using a Girardian lens. The novel offers a Marxist paradigm of the political transformation of a traditional peasant society into a capitalist one, and the synchronisation of events is highlighted as adding an element of complexity to the plot. The discussion has focused on the disaster that obliterates the villagers’ hierarchal differences of the villagers, effectively blurring the enemy/friend distinction as each rush to blame the other. As has been shown, this negative reciprocity paradoxically unites the locals against the newcomers. Nevertheless, although scapegoating aims to restore social cohesion and harmony to the community, the course of events proves its failure. Blaming and punishing the strangers instead creates a sense of collective shame, which manifests as a general feeling of unease and malaise. Moreover, the capitalist social organisation of the village further undermines the collective scapegoating, leading to the fragmentation of the locals’ social structure, and thus Mr Earl’s map becomes the reality of the village.

 It is worth noting that the punishment of the newcomers raises another argument that challenges the Girardian one. According to Foucault (1979), ‘Torture does not reconcile’ (40), but re-establish power of the sovereignty over its subjects. This is evident in the paradoxical shift in the strangers’ trial from being suspicious arsonists to ‘suspicious travelers’ (30). Such a transition indicates that Master Kent is dealing with the newcomers as a political fact, as if they are illegal migrants, rather than wrongdoers. He proclaims a law that must be followed without illustrating its contents. The ambiguity of this law serves to suggest that it is a malleable law, and the moving of the strangers’ trial also suggests that Master Kent takes their presence as an opportunity to solve the crisis of his legitimacy as the master of the unnamed village, since his wife is dead. Therefore, punishing the strangers, with all the ceremonial aspects that unfold, indicates such a claim through ritual and the exertion of power over others, for it reflects to a large degree the eighteenth century’s punitive practice. According to Foucault (1979):

The public execution, then, has a juridico-political function. It is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted. It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular. The public execution, however hasty and every day, belongs to a whole series of great rituals in which power is eclipsed and restored (coronation, entry of the king into a conquered city, the submission of rebellious subjects); over and above the crime that has placed the sovereign in contempt, it deploys before all eyes an invincible force. Its aim is not to re-establish a balance as to bring into play […] the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength. (48)

The violent punishment of the newcomers per se does not legitimise Master Kent’s sovereignty, for violence is not in itself the essence of government (Arendt, 1970). Rather, his legitimacy, strictly speaking, is constituted by the right to punish, which the locals voluntarily leave to him; an act of empowerment *par excellence*, as Agamben (1995) asserts that this right is ‘the foundation of sovereign power’ (106). Therefore, disfiguring the accused and the use of the pillory are regarded by the public at large as a torture rather than a mere penalty, which in essence affirms Master Kent’s position as the holder of sovereignty. Thus, his decision to suspend the norm renders the strangers the status of *homo sacer*. The following chapter will consider this type of victim in terms of Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*.

**Chapter Three: Homo Sacer and Abjection in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go***

**3.1. Context:**

In the previous chapter, this thesis examined victims of scapegoating in the context of Jim Crace’s *Harvest*, offering a glimpse into the religious understanding of victimhood that rests upon the binary logic of friend versus enemy.[[21]](#footnote-22) This duality has been criticised by a number of scholars for its over simplicity. Most prominent amongst detractors is Agamben (1995), who asserts that: ‘The fundamental categorical pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare/political existence, *zoē* /*bios*, exclusion/inclusion’ (8). Such categories, as Enns (2012) observes, result in a particular kind of debasement of certain non-subjects, since

Those reduced to “mere existence” are beyond the pale of the law, not merely unequal before the law but completely outside it, not merely oppressed, as nobody wants even to oppress them. Without a political community to which they belong, though which their needs will be met, their rights cannot be protected, and their voices will not count. (185)

I will argue here that such an analysis is crucial to understand the construction of victimhood in Ishiguro’s novel, and in post-millennial British fiction more widely. We have already seen such processes elaborated in fictional forms in Jim Crace’s (2013) *Harvest* where in the unnamed village such a dynamic of inclusion/exclusion is evident and played out with tragic consequences and much upheaval. Once the central authority launches its politics of fear (which transforms the traditional communal society into an individualistic capitalist one, proclaiming the emergence of governmentality), the sovereign decision not only changes the sociocultural landscape, but also politicises the *zoē*, the local individual, and therefore produces what Agamben terms “*homo sacer*”: the political figure who can be killed with impunity. The outsiders are drawn into an essentially local conflict, even though they are only passing through. The central powers-that-be are indifferent to any such marginality of those upon whom that central authority exerts its power through a seemingly arbitrary punishment (which causes the death of one of the men among a group of strangers in *Harvest*). Power is revealed in effect as its own justification, since there is no process of appeal for those who fall victim to it. According to Agamben (1995):

The same bare life that in the *ancien* *régime* was politically neutral and belonged to God as creaturely life and in the classical world was (at least apparently) clearly distinguished as *zoē* from political life (*bios*) now fully enters into the structure of the state and even becomes the earthly foundation of the state’s legitimacy and sovereignty. (127) [emphasis in original]

Such dissolution is primarily due to the exception becoming the norm. In the light of this argument, the current chapter seeks to scrutinise such political figures – those exerting power and authority, and those subject to such forces to their detriment – in contemporary British fiction by considering Kazuo Ishiguro’s critically acclaimed novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005), in which he presents a late 1990s alternate Britain. In this version of the country, as the reader gradually discovers, a number of well-developed scientific discoveries have enabled the authorities to breed clones for the sake of organ harvesting. As a result, the ‘authentic,’ original human beings can benefit from the organs of the clones without having to directly confront the ethical issues.[[22]](#footnote-23) For Peter Boxall (2013) the novel ‘most fully explores the experience of unbound being, in the context of the contemporary phenomenon of artificial life’ (98), clearly raising a range of ethical issues, and the question of authenticity as regards such replications of human life. The clones’ existence is revealed by degrees as precarious, full of vulnerability and dismissal by the social structures in which they are raised, a condition very much like that described by Enns (2012): ‘Precarity is thus “politically induced” in an operation that separates the human from the inhuman, those whose lives have been rendered worthless’ (187). Indeed, forcing a population to live at the boundaries of the established norm produces such precarity and shapes their behaviours and public image.

Ishiguro’s story is one of implied victimhood, narrated in the first person by one of the clones, Kathy H, who states ‘I’m thirty-one years old’ (3); she recalls her life and its key events. She has worked for ‘over eleven years’ (3) as a carer, having left Hailsham, a boarding school where the clones are raised, kept apart by force from the rest of the society. In such a fictional context, the novel teases out the rapid increase of bio-politics that intervenes in every aspect of the human body, bringing to light the inner contradiction of modern democracy – that its strength relies on the body of bare life, a disempowered abjection of those excluded from meaningful power. According to Agamben (1995), ‘Modern democracy does not abolish sacred life but rather shatters it and disseminates it into every individual body, making it into what is at stake in political conflict’ (124). Indeed, this is useful in situating a culture where individuality is all, but its benefits are denied to many groups: for example, the ill-educated, the homeless, the dispossessed or the displaced, including the migrant.

 In terms of Ishiguro’s narrative, one might note of the clones themselves, whose lives are necessarily short and therefore what the rest of the society might consider to be incomplete, that they seem powerless and marginal, but have familiar desires that the reader recognises as characteristics of childhood and adolescence. The paradox of such an existence, with visceral responses and even memories that will be finally negated, seems to superficially have clear affinities to a more normal human existence, given the apparent similarities the reader encounters. Yet, the clones’ own account of themselves, given that they are radically incomplete, is in effect rendered incoherent, since they have no political rights. This draws upon the logic of the state of exception described by Agamben (2005), as being

neither external nor internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other. The suspension of the norm does not mean its abolition […]. (23)

The clones find themselves in this challenging and obscure condition, whereby their political rights are completely absent, but this does not provoke a collective struggle. Indeed, in some sense, Ishiguro’s narrative inverts the paradigm that underpins Girard’s scapegoating, where there is a (literal or symbolic) sacrificial victim. In this case, all bodies are sacralised because, as Agamben (1995) argues, democracy needs a body over which it may exert its authority. While ‘one can speak, in this sense, of “law’s desire to have a body,” democracy responds to this desire by compelling law to assume the care of this body’ (124-125). This process does not occur through subjective violence, but systematically, ‘through the repetition of the sovereign exception and the isolation of *corpus*, bare life’ (Agamben, 1995, 124) in the subject. Such constant repetition (in Agamben’s sense) of the imposition of panoptic control and destabilisation of those so excluded is emphasised in the novel through its sequential movement between spatial settings and its highlighting of the necessity to redefine the actual and ideological line that divides the clones from the city and the general non-cloned populace in each of these spaces. As *Never Let Me Go* progresses, the social pattern of the clones moves from an apparent collectivism (of the very young) to individualism, so that they face their fate divided from the carers, who are clones tasked with facilitating this surgical death. Once that reality becomes obvious to the reader, Ishiguro has succeeded in providing a revelatory perception described by Henri Lefebvre (1971): ‘there was a power conceived in everyday life’s apparent banality, a depth beneath its triviality, *something extraordinary in its every ordinariness*’ (37) [emphasis in original]. The system that Hailsham represents precisely both banalises and trivialises its underlying truths, and so the clones’ awareness and curiosity are dampened enough that indoctrination can function; the extraordinary truth concealed until accepted. Yet, this social change toward a more individual life is paradoxically synchronised with the gradual dissolution of the physical borders that divide the clones from the rest of the society, for once they leave Hailsham, the ideological process of indoctrination that is so fundamental to their existence is sufficiently embedded. They adhere to this imposed social order, and the original rigid physical separation is no longer necessary, since they regulate themselves according to the required pattern of existence, which eventually leads to their being willingly euthanised. The all-encompassing aspects of this process are metaphorically described by Tommy, one of the two closest clone friends of the narrator, when he addresses her toward the end of the novel, deploying a Heraclitan metaphor:

‘I keep thinking about this river somewhere, with the water moving really fast. And these two people in the water, trying to hold onto each other, holding on as hard as they can, but at the end it’s just too much. The current’s too strong. They’ve got to let go, drift apart. That’s how I think it is with us. It’s a shame, Kath, because we loved each other all our lives. But in the end, we can’t stay together forever.’ (277)

This reminds the reader of the title – but here the two have ‘got to let go’. Both characters are aware of Kathy’s role as a carer, embedded in the system that exploits them; indeed, Anne Whitehead (2021) writes of the narrator that she ‘foregrounds her professional identity as a carer from the very first pages of the novel’ (30). Via such awareness, the novel limits the degree of empathy that its narrative might evoke, because of the radical difference between the lives of the clones and Ishiguro’s readers. The audience approaches the narrative with their experiential framework, naivete and perhaps even an underlying resistance to and annoyance at the clones’ submissive nature and apathy. As Thom Dancer (2021) states: ‘*Never Let Me Go* continually makes us aware of our inability to relate to the clones by reminding us that we are not identical to whom Kathy’s narrative is addressed’ (149), and argues that readers of the novel ‘rarely come away from the novel feeling satisfied with the protagonists’ action. Rather, they experience an extreme sense of frustration with and disconnection from the narrator, Kathy H, and her friends’ (151), who seem to resist being redeemed.

In an interview with Vanessa Guignery (2012), Ishiguro explained that the title of *Never Let Me Go* is drawn from an actual sentimental song ‘by Jay Livingston who wrote songs in the fifties’ (60), and its narrative is based on a post-war world that involved ‘swapping the breakthrough in nuclear physics with the breakthroughs in biotechnology’ (62). In essence, Ishiguro reconfigures the period’s significant scientific progress from the first crucial field to the second. Both involve death, but the biotechnological alternative is less monumentally dramatic and more individualised. Hence, strictly speaking, its narrative represents an alternative present, with a slight shift of emphasis, but still a very recognisable cultural milieu. Despite this authorial claim though, Josie Gill (2014) notes that ‘Ishiguro provides little scientific detail about how human cloning has arisen […]’ (845). Karl Shaddox (2013) extends this point, by observing the following:

As others have noted, however, it is a story in which science and technology are conspicuously absent. Though the novel is narrated by a human clone and the major characters are clones, no scientists or doctors appear; there is no theory or explanation of genetic replication and we see nothing of its mechanics and implementation. Indeed, the most technologically advanced item to appear in the novel is the automobile. (449)

This factor also militates against what Dancer (2021) describes as ‘relatability [which] is a personal connection to the text’ (150). Additionally, the novel creates a separation from our own world, since it remains ill-defined, highly subjective and rendered from Kathy’s viewpoint. Indeed, the knowledge that they are clones is entirely and understandably contextual, since the novel is narrated by a clone who is ignorant of the underlying science that has produced her. Rather, she strives to reconstruct her own past that is presented as apparently random flashbacks sketched on three spatial canvases, on which the novel is organised. The first part takes place in Hailsham, a boarding school where the clones are raised in a strict environment and ruled by teachers called the ‘guardians’ (who arguably represent the ruling class in Plato’s just society, since the school is configured as a utopian place in the protagonist’s memory).

The second section of the novel opens with Kathy recollecting driving through marshland or furrowed fields framed by ‘sky big and grey and never changing mile after mile’ (113). She is reminded of ‘the Cottages’ (113) which sit in abandoned farmland, where some of the Hailsham clones live in isolation after leaving that institution. This section of the narrative mainly focuses on her experiences in this isolated spot near a graveyard, a place with few buildings, apart from ‘the remains of a farm that had gone out of business years before. There was an old farmhouse, and around it, barns, outhouses, stables, all converted for us to live in’ (114). This off-site extension of the donation programme is inhabited by two groups of people: the veterans and the newcomers, the latter of which have just arrived from institutions like Hailsham. In this remote area, which according to Kathy has ‘only the most tenuous links with Hailsham’ (114). She and her friends have the opportunity to explore society; not directly, but through an abstract symbolism received virtually via various broadcasting channels. As Kathy observes, ‘There was, incidentally, something I noticed about these veterans couples at the cottages – something Ruth, for all her close study of them, failed to spot- and this was how so many of their mannerisms were copied from the television’ (118). Furthermore, contrary to the rules and customs that prevail at Hailsham, sexual intercourse occupies a significant role in the Cottages: the clones are encouraged, either directly or by ideological means, to spend a considerable time in such erotic activities. Additionally, they may also opt to read and write to continue their educative and creative journey that began at Hailsham. Whitehead (2021) insists that although the Guardians hold the belief that reading humanises the clones, in reality ‘the humanities education at Hailsham is at best a deception or lie, and at worst, complicit with the system of political oppression to which the clones are subject’ (56-57). In a broad sense, Gill (2014) concurs, arguing that the purpose of these assignments remains less than benevolent, it is part of a larger divertissement (the clones’ treatment is part of a subtle process of indoctrination). She describes such past times as, ‘Distracting the students from their impending deaths, [since] their essays and reading are merely an extension of an education that has prevented them from reaching a true understanding of their situation’ (853).

 Finally, there are the hospitals, in which the clones are divided into two groups: carers and donors. In this section of the novel, Kathy reunites with her old friends, whose relationships have faded due to a conflict between them during their time in the Cottages, so ironically a reconciliation of sorts is achieved both through her and as a result of the system. Being a carer for both Tommy and Ruth, allows Kathy to visit them regularly through which old memories they share are revived. Eventually, Kathy watches them die after they have donated their vital organs and she calmly expects the same fate, having been enculturated toward such obedience by the system at the school and its associated extensions.

The rest of this chapter is divided into five sections: the Bildungsroman in *Never Let Me Go*, Simulated Ethics and Aesthetics, Hailsham: The Zone of Exception, Metalanguage, and Empathy and Collective memory. First, the significance of the retrospective narration will be explored as told from a first-person perspective in terms of victimhood. The focus of the second section is the inherent contradiction of Kathy’s profession, which she excessively idealises by stressing her relationships with the donors for whom she cares. This section will also draw on the inner consciousness of the clones and how this inborn self is constructed and affected or shaped by external forces through an examination of Tommy’s art. This leads to an exploration of Hailsham in terms of the way it is depicted and how it influences the clones ideologically, a matter that is largely guided by language. As Keith McDonald (2007) observes: ‘The children (or captives) are described as “special” and “gifted” by their guardians (or wardens), and their murders are described as “completions,” a jarring reminder of their sole purpose in the eyes of society, and of the ways in which language can normalize atrocities deemed necessary in a given ideology’ (78). Surely, such a gap between sign and meaning highlights the subtle art of the underlying ideology depicted in the novel, which although key to all the unfolding events, does not surface in Kathy’s narration as a major cause of the clones’ victimisation, remaining only a paradoxical undercurrent. Yet, Hailsham is presented as a utopian place by the protagonist. The embedded irony of this seemingly privileged estate ascribes to Hailsham a sense of Gothicism, since according to David Punter (2016), ‘in its manifestations even prior to the late eighteenth century Gothic stood for a kind of nationalism, and all nationalisms have their devilish side. And so it remains: Gothic effects discriminations, as it always has, and some of those discriminations, political, religious, gender-based, are rightly the object of disgust’ (5). This chapter will also explore aspects of trauma and memory, arguing that trauma has the capacity to enhance the memory of the victims. By the end of this chapter, the mechanisms and significance of the political thought of victimhood will have been fully explored, offering a foundation for the discussion in the following chapter, which focuses on alienation in Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom*.

**3.2. Bildungsroman in *Never Let Me Go***

The main protagonist, Kathy, offers an intensely personal view of an essentially inhumane system run by a very few individuals while configuring the lives of so many. This seems familiar as a narrative, but the context defamiliarises its effect as a Bildungsroman. As McDonald (2007) observes: ‘*Never Let Me Go* is a novel that utilizes many of the techniques of the autobiographical memoir, while simultaneously barring itself from classification as an example of this genera’ (75). In allowing a clone to narrate, *Never Let Me Go* goes follows Mary Shelley’s strategy with her depiction of the monster in *Frankenstein*: both authors present isolated creatures deprived of all rights, created scientifically and raised in Gothic estates. More importantly, in both cases they are given the chance to articulate their own stories and are not in any sense an enemy or in the full sense a monster. Marilyn Butler (1981) argues that in Mary Shelley’s novel, ‘The Monster is evil only because it is rejected and unsocialized’ (142), which is precisely why the Guardians at Hailsham take such pains with their charges. Hence, in Kathy’s depiction, her narrative of herself is retrospective, tinged with nostalgia and regret, full of human longing and loss because her two closest friends have been sacrificed to the cloning process:

I was talking to one of my donors a few days ago who was complaining about how memories, even your most precious ones, fade surprisingly quickly. But I don’t go along with that. 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.

I suppose I lost Hailsham too. You still hear stories about some ex-Hailsham student trying to find it, or rather the place where it used to be. And the odd rumour will go round sometimes about what Hailsham’s become these days – a hotel, a school, a ruin. Myself, for all the driving I do, I’ve never tried to find it. I’m not really interested in seeing it, whatever way it is now. (280)

Since Kathy recounts her most important experiences from childhood to maturation, her narration appears to adhere to the principles underpinning the literary genre of the Bildungsroman. This framing invites the person she addresses in the second person – whom Will Kanyusik (2020) labels ‘an unnamed interlocutor’ (437) – at certain points, as if an intimacy is assumed or established. The narrative charts the development of her character as well as that of her two close friends: Ruth and Tommy. As for readers, they can listen to their intimacies, eavesdropping on them, which develops a curious relationship whereby the reader inevitably participates in the assessment of these lives.

 The significance of Ishiguro’s choice of this literary sub-genre relies upon three focal points. Firstly, the Bildungsroman form in *Never Let Me Go* serves to emphasize class struggle, offering an in-depth view of societal issues from multiple angles fixed by the character’s gradual development. However, ‘in regular *Bildungsroman*’, as Carol Guesse (2016) notes, ‘the protagonist learns to insert himself correctly into society, while in Ishiguro’s novel, when Kathy and her friends leave school and should therefore enter general society, they instead gradually *de-socialise* themselves from the rest of the world’ (158) [emphasis in original]. One might extend this point with reference to Lee’s (2019) reading, which relies on a critique of residual imperial identities that underpin this sub-genre and which Kathy’s narrative serves to interrogate as an ‘anti-bildungsroman’ or ‘a postcolonial bildungsroman’ (273):

I read Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* as a postcolonial bildungsroman in which the Western genre of individual development is criticized by an organ-donor clone’s narrative of colonial subjectivity, rendered in terms of space. Unlike the traditional bildungsroman, which follows protagonists’ growth along a temporal progression, *Never Let Me Go* describes individual development, or un-development, as interlocked oscillations between domestic and institutional spaces, which are in fact combined into the clones’ residences. Her retrospective narrative shows that clones must develop different modes of subjectivity as they move from one residence to another […]. (272)

Here, Lee argues that Ishiguro challenges the traditional Bildungsroman model in which the agency of the protagonists is central in achieving a certain level of self-progression within a linear time frame. This is evident from Kathy’s self-development being spatially constrained, preventing her from stepping beyond her inferior position that is intimately linked with colonial subjectivity. Kathy and her addressee share a key relation that shapes her victimisation, for as Kanyusik (2020) notes, this is ‘a first-person narrative told by one clone to another. [so that] the story represents an attempt of the narrator to define herself in opposition to the abject status forced upon her by a eugenicist society dependent on her dehumanization for its existence’ (438). Indeed, Kathy’s exclusion from an early age has made an outsider of her and her fellow clones; a separate category to whom human rights are at least implicitly denied. This paradoxical exclusion has been analysed by Žižek (2009) as follows:

Post-politics bio-politics also has two aspects which cannot but appear to belong to two opposite ideological spaces: that of the reduction of humans to ‘bare life’, to Homo sacer, that so-called sacred being who is the object of expert caretaking knowledge, but excluded […] from all rights. (35)

Such simultaneous exclusion/inclusion is echoed in Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry which Lee applies in his analysis of Ishiguro’s novel. According to Lee (2019), ‘Bhabha argues that the mimic man is the product of colonial education that provides him with ample opportunities to cultivate his individual self without promising the prestige that English citizens enjoy’ (275). As Lee observes, this finds a clear parallel in the novel presented by an education that indoctrinates the clones, and its influence extends beyond the frontiers of Hailsham. During their time at the Cottages, for instance, Ruth fantasises about an office job (141), with Kathy aware that such talk has been derived from an environment depicted in a found object while on a walk: ‘this glossy double page advert, and though the paper had gone soggy and there was mud at one corner, you could still see it well enough’ (142). Her fantasy is second-hand, from detritus that has been discarded, as the children themselves will eventually be.

 Interestingly, the sovereign control over the clone is shown even in terms itself, which is a socially approved designation that serves to exclude Kathy and the other residents of Hailsham. This explains the dread of them by other citizens (who are regarded as or at least called normal). The clones’ response is an instinctual response programmed by literal separation (in institutions like Hailsham) and a categorical one, for being clones is to be less than human in a linguistic sense, a scientific copy which is rendered at least implicitly uncanny.

 Secondly, since personal and collective trauma plays a significant role in the novel, this reaction is caused in the clones by the aftershock of the deaths of their peers. As such the Bildungsroman offers an enhanced picture of the protagonist’s memory, reflecting the case made by Joshua Pederson (2014) for a new model of literary trauma that allows for the recollection (even if only in a fragmentary fashion) of the origin of trauma: the initiating event(s). Pederson’s main argument is that victims of traumatic events memorise particulars of their horrific experience, although they may not have the ability to speak of them articulately. By arguing this, Pederson opposes the first wave of trauma theorists such as Caruth (2016), who stress the amnesiac feature of victims in the aftermath of a psychologically devastating occurrence (Pederson, 2014) (see also: Visser, 2011). Pederson (2014) refutes this argument by claiming that such a view relies on a narrow perspective that focuses on one part of the traumatic event and its potential negation in its aftermath. Instead, Pederson (2014) encourages trauma theorists to take every element of the episode into consideration, accentuating ‘both the accessibility of traumatic memory and the possibility that victims may construct a reliable account of it’ (338) represented in their ultra-detailed narratives. He concedes on occasion these may be distorted, with certain elements highlighted while others may not be. Such memories occupy a significant role in the novel, and Kathy shows the impulse to summon many of them, particularly when she reflects:

I won’t be a carer any more come the end of the year, and though I’ve got a lot out of it, I have to admit I’ll welcome the chance to rest – to stop and think and remember. I’m sure it’s at least partly to do with that, to do with preparing for the change of pace, that I’ve been getting this urge to order all these old memories. What I really wanted, I suppose, was to get straight all the things that happened between me and Tommy and Ruth after we grew up and left Hailsham. (37)

Ironically, to understand the dynamics she seeks, Kathy finds herself in a position where she must retrieve events from her fellow-pupils’ days at the school; events which are all components of the ideological matrix in which they find themselves enmeshed. In effect, the donation programme is never declared or revealed to the clones in a direct fashion. Rather, it operates via its own trajectory of indifference and cruelty that depends upon a set of initially covert intentions (hidden from the clones as children) which are normalised through local cultural and social practices. This is embedded structurally in Kathy’s narrative form, as Lee (2019) observes: ‘She frequently moves back and forth in time in order to ponder the limited information she had at certain points. Each chapter opens with her self-awareness of her narrative structure […]. She constantly refers to the advantage of hindsight […]’ (278-279). Indeed, such an imbalance in the pattern of narration destabilises the relationship between the reader and the narrator, as Whitehead (2021) observes: ‘Ishiguro’s use of second-person address throughout the novel, a device commonly used in Victorian fiction to enhance sympathetic connection. *In Never Let Me Go*, however, it acts rather to unsettle the reader, and to call into question how or where she is indeed positioned in relation to Kathy’ (2011, 58). One might extend this point with reference to Patrick R. Query’s (2015) observation that ‘Readers of the novel, sympathetic and otherwise, consistently note their frustration with Kathy H.’s insistence, based on her assumption that her audience possesses a knowledge that it, in fact, does not, on telling a story other than the one she ought to be telling, and taking her time in doing so’ (156). Indeed, such a pattern of narration renders the reader questioning Kathy’s self-perception (as a victim) and how far she empathises with her fellow clones.

Thirdly, the realist features of the Bildungsroman allow the reader to engage with the character if not fully empathically then partially so, since the similarities between the topography of their worlds surface certain details that parallel those familiar to a reader whatever their frustrations. Indeed, the latter may animate them to pay more attention to such harmonies (Guesse, 2016). Even the negative elements may echo, since as Query (2015) states in positioning the novel: ‘It is not difficult to find examples in daily life of great abuses, inequities, and plain limitations that people accept as a matter of course. The chasm readers perceive between how the characters, particularly the clones, act and how we wish they would seem significantly less vast in such a light’ (156). In addition to the spatial details (obvious institutional ones such as the existence schools and hospitals), the novel’s time setting corresponds to the reader’s own detailed cultural knowledge of contemporary society, which apart from the donation programme, is very similar. This provides a sense of familiarity and perhaps affinity with this fictional world that has the ability to trigger a collective memory associated with a particular time. In terms of this context, as Guignery (2012) observes, the author ‘conceived this dystopian version of England as a metaphor for the world we live in and imagined the book as a study of the way we all face up to mortality’ (45). As Query (2015) notes, the novel ‘directs attention to the world in which it is read, as opposed to the one it depicts: an elucidation of the experience of novel reading itself’ (157), and since the narrative ‘thematizes acquiescence, [it] challenges readers to link the docile assent they are reading about with their own habits of assent as readers and as persons’ (157). Given that the novel begins in the late 1990s and the protagonist is thirty-one years old, this period not only covers three critical pre-millennial decades that have subsequently shaped post-millennial Britain significantly (including the effects on contemporary life of the Thatcherite decade), but also marks what Baudrillard (1993) labels as the time ‘after the orgy’ (3). By the “orgy”, Baudrillard (1993) refers to the 1960s revolution that has overwhelmed traditional values in every social domain (as regards the political, the sexual, notions of identity and even sport), not by means of abolishing their core, but in the sense of liberating their intrinsic components so that they ‘can enter a state of pure circulation’ (4). Baudrillard calls this process ‘simulation’, which is ‘the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: hyperreal’ (Baudrillard, 1994). Here meaning is created in a system that serves to sustain itself. Indeed, in the novel such a hyperreal quality is projected onto language and its associated activities. Death, for instance, is instead referred to as an elaborate harvesting process that is implicitly framed in terms associated with being humane and caring. Added to this, the authorities create artificial forms of activity for ‘the Exchange’ (16), consisting of buying artworks created by the clones whatever their quality, and forcing them to follow their erroneous patterns of being and beliefs, which this chapter seeks to investigate more broadly in the next section.

**3.3. Simulated Ethics and Aesthetics**

The novel opens with Kathy introducing herself in a conspicuously straightforward manner by declaring her current profession within what the reader will eventually realize is, a totalitarian system:

My name is Kathy H. I’m thirty-one years old, and I’ve been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months. […] [T]hey’ve been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too. My donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as ‘agitated’, even before fourth donation. Okay, maybe I *am* boasting now. But it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well, especially that bit about my donors staying ‘calm’. (Ishiguro, 2005, 3). [emphasis in original]

I shall return to the theme of immediacy of self-presenting and its relation to guilt and shame later in this section. Since Kathy’s imminent retirement as a carer to be a donor is in fact a signification of the closeness of her own death, her self-presenting is arguably an inauguration (or practice) for a confession (or revelation) that she is about to present to other fellow clones who are not from Hailsham. As indicated above, this is evident from her assuming the familiarity of her audience with the given procedural mechanisms of the system as it moves these less-than-subjects toward an inevitable medicalised annihilation. However, this affinity is not absolute: there is a realised difference between Kathy and her reader (as her target audience) evoked in her narration; an experiential and attitudinal framework the latter very possibly cannot fully grasp. On multiple occasions, Kathy addresses this audience directly to affirm this gap. For example, Kathy mentions the excellent skills she embraces that most carers lack. She takes pride in the fact that ‘My donors have always tended to do much better than expected’ (3) and, she stresses of her fellow carers that ‘If you’re one of them, I can understand how you might get resentful – about my bedsit, my car, above all, the way I get to pick and choose who I look after’ (3). For Boxall (2013), her mode of direct address assumes a certain commonality:

In addressing us in this way, the novel identifies and transgresses a limit that separates the human and the non-human, setting up a stunted dialogue that takes place across a species boundary. […] In calling to us in this way, repeatedly throughout the narrative, Kathy assumes we too have to undergo repeated medicals to check that we are looking after our valuable body parts properly. But in making this assumption, she produces a kind of line between her and us, a kind of limit that we ourselves interpose. A non-clone reader (perhaps there is no other) addressed in this way will refuse, to some degree, the kind of community, the kind of bond, that this address reaches for. (99)

The audience may consider clones as another species, but the salient point is that in this alternate Britain they are regarded as such within the social framework of norms. Moreover, if this observation is correct, it seems doubly ironic since Kathy is unaware of evoking such a response. Such an unknowingly elicited bond and sense of belonging are unconscious yearnings she finds it hard to either accept or articulate directly. On the contrary, subtending her narration is an eagerness to build bonds with others to end her loneliness, and yet she states that ‘Even the solitude, I’ve actually grown to quite like’ (204), adding ‘Sometimes I got so immersed in my own company, if I unexpectedly run into someone I know, it’s a bit of a shock and takes me a while to adjust’ (204), which affirms her self-alienation. And since her constructed self is originally designed and constrained by relations that serve the authorities’ ends (to be a carer, followed a donor), one might consider that she is not addressing a so-called ‘normal’ audience. This is especially evident when considering the influence that such an imposed division is explicit in the infrastructure of the state, since according to Kathy:

I kept us on the most obscure back roads I know, where only our headlights disturbed the darkness. We’d occasionally encounter other headlights, and then I’d get the feeling they belonged to other carers, driving home alone, or maybe like me, with a donor beside them. I realised, of course, that other people used these roads; but that night, it seemed to me these dark byways of the country existed just for the likes of us, while the big glittering motorways with their huge signs and super café were for everyone else. (267)

From the perspective of a class of beings subject to marginality, Kathy sees herself as privileged and declares that such a status is derived from and centred on her relation to Hailsham. Indeed, this indicates a social hierarchy – even among the clones who become carers – that is expressed plainly in Kathy’s tendency to select donors from Hailsham: ‘So when you get a chance to choose, of course, you choose your own kind. That’s natural’ (4). This not only provides a preliminary impression of Kathy’s circle in Hailsham (evidently influenced by social Darwinism), but also casts a light on the paradox underpinning the profession of carers, which is essentially a complicity that has been camouflaged by a fundamentally humanitarian value. In other words, it involves passive participation in a butchery-like process that contradicts the direct meaning of care. Yet, repeating this traumatic process ironically provokes a sense of surplus enjoyment, as the whole process forms a sense of unity amongst the carers despite their impotence and victimhood.

Such an inherited paradox in the role of carers calls to our attention a similar problematic profession with a comparable level of powerlessness, that is, the profession of nursing. According to Michael Traynor and Alicia Evans (2014):

 Nursing is a gendered and contradictory profession: a new occupational opportunity for women in 19th century Britain but cast in quasi-religious subservient terms; promotes notions of autonomy yet experiences a limited sphere of agency; it emulates medicine’s status but constantly struggles for influence and recognition. Nursing has identified with “caring” to differentiate itself from so-called “curing” medicine yet today in the UK, that image is tarnished by scandals of cruelty and failures to care. (193)

Although Traynor and Evans have not highlighted the gender disparity in nursing, their argument scrutinises the paradoxical phenomenon associated with this profession, noting that the attempt of professionalising nursing using humane values is doomed to failure. This is not because the profession in question is usually staffed by those of female gender struggling for an identity within a masculine system, and therefore eager to be recognised. Rather, it is due to the ‘possibly unrealistic idealism’ (193) that combines the legacy of self-sacrificing and the idealisation of intimate relationships with patients. Such unrealistic idealism is also evident in Kathy’s introduction, whereby the reader is able to perceive the legacy of Hailsham, the traditional institution.

Kathy is submissive to the illusion propagated and sustained by the system, unlike Tommy. During his childhood, Tommy’s inner-self often strays from the consistency preserved and maintained within his surroundings, and he responds to his self-alienation with loud tantrums. One of the major causes of such social disconnection is Tommy’s art, which does not comply with the authority’s expectations. This matter exposes him to the bullying of his peers, and to guardians’ criticism for not being ‘creative’ (10). Indeed, this offers a clear indication of the officials’ direct interference in every aspect of the individual life because the word creative becomes a definite category by which the person is either included or excluded. Take the example of Kathy’s conversation with Ruth at Dover’s centre about the Exchange while remembering their days at Hailsham. Kathy indicates that poetry might be regarded as an example of the Exchange’s ambiguity, being important precisely because it diverts the children from any underlying realities. Thereby, it constrains the clones by undermining any potential criticism of the system, offering an outlet for both their energy, in general, and their creativity. In effect, it moulds their behaviour:

But we’re talking about a nine-year-old stuff, funny little lines, all misspelt, in exercise book. We’d spend our precious tokens on an exercise book full of that stuff rather than on something really nice for around our beds. If we were so keen on a person’s poetry, why didn’t we just borrow it and copy it down ourselves any old afternoon? But you remember how it was. An Exchange would come along and we’d be standing torn between Susie K.’s poems and those giraffes Jackie used to make. (17)

Kathy contextualises this dialogue between her and Ruth as occurring when she is caring for her friend from Hailsham after her ‘first donation’, Kathy visiting the designated ‘recovery room’ (17) and the pair reminiscing nostalgically on a summer evening. Kathy adds:

“What I’m saying,’ I went on, ‘is that when we were that age, when we were eleven, say, we really weren’t interested in each other’s poems at all. But remember, someone like Christy? Christy had this great reputation for poetry, and we all looked up to her for it. Even you, Ruth, you didn’t dare boss Christy around. All because we thought she was great at poetry. But we didn’t know a thing about poetry. We didn’t care about it. It’s strange.” (18)

In essence, poetry is not aesthetically appreciated by the clones or anyone else as art should be. It loses its core value within the process of materialisation in a capitalist world where every object is subject to commodification. As Baudrillard (1993) observes: ‘Like all disappearing forms, art seeks to duplicate itself by means of simulation, but it will nevertheless soon be gone, leaving behind an immense museum of artificial art and abandoning the field completely to advertising’ (17). This echoes the scenario presented in the novel, since poetry, as a subject of conversation by itself, interwoven with a totally separate topic that originally has no connection with aesthetics. Equally Christy, who is recognised as a poet among the clones, has no distinctive poetic talent that she could be remembered by, but ironically, she is still included as a creative in this field. Regarding those whose works are memorable, as in the case of Jackie’s giraffes, they are a far cry from art since their creations are simply repetition influenced by an environment that fosters economic reproduction. This reflects Baudrillard’s (1993) observation when he says: ‘Behind the whole convulsive movement of modern art lies a kind of inertia, something that can no longer transcend itself and has therefore turned in upon itself, merely repeating itself at a faster and faster rate’ (15). Thus, instead of being a source of pleasure, art has lost its meaning and becomes a source of profit without stirring any emotional impression. Without its intrinsic value, it also lacks any creativity. This is not the case with Tommy. As Kathy describes his hidden artwork later at the hospital:

That was when I first saw his animals. […] In fact, it took a moment to see they were animals at all. The first impression was like one you’d get if you took the back off a radio set: tiny canals, weaving tendons, miniature screws and wheels were all drawn with obsessive precision, and only when you see it was some kind of armadillo, say, or bird.

[…]

 [B]ut by this time, I was becoming genuinely drawn to these fantastical creatures in front of me. For all their busy, metallic features, there was something sweet, even vulnerable about each of them. I remembered him telling me, in Norfolk, that he worried, even as he created them, how they’d protect themselves or be able to reach and fetch things, and looking at them now, I could feel the same sort of concerns. (184-185)

Clearly, this description is given to an aesthetically profound artwork that is poles apart from the above-mentioned crafts. The drawings evoke the deepest and darkest side of the clones’ lives by exaggerating both the way they are perceived (regarded by others as being akin to animals, closer to them than other humans) and their ultimate fate (as being spare parts for the non-cloned people). In such a remarkable power of illusion that provokes the sense of empathy in its observer, Tommy has presented the reality of his own vulnerability in the very fragility and incompletion of these objects as opposed to a reality capturing these dynamics in a genuinely polished aesthetic form, and this is how art should be from a strict Baudrillardian perspective. From this point of view, one could agree with Shaddox (2013), who argues that: ‘The message of the novel, human clones are fully human and so should not be treated as animals on the hoof, is not argued or debated; rather, it is rendered by the readers’ own affective resonance with Kathy and the other clones’ emotional lives’ (450), which seems to oppose Boxall’s above-mentioned claim. However, it appears that aspects of both positions might be partially reconciled, in that we perceive a fundamental need for humanity in the clones, but their failure to fully demand that status due to systemic exclusion is odd and frustrating; this means the human reader partially empathises with, but cannot shake off, the underlying uncanny qualities in these beings.

Despite his talent, Tommy has been socially excluded from the artificial creativity that takes place in Hailsham, with the clones’ artworks stored there until some are bought. However, the sudden change in Tommy’s attitude (from being an easily irritated person to becoming a calm and socially integrated one), drives Kathy to interrogate him, only to discover that Miss Lucy secretly approved of his unique artwork so that it is not socially rejected and perceived as non-creative (26). This endorsement maintains in Tommy a sense of existence, as it constitutes a meaningful relationship that illuminates the darkness of his self-alienation, influencing the way he and Miss Lucy communicate with each other. According to Kathy’s rendering of Tommy’s account: ‘“I’d look at her, and she’d sometimes see me [Tommy] and give me a little nod. And that’s all I needed”’ (29). Yet, towards the end of the novel, this consistency is disrupted during the unsolicited visit he and Kathy pay to the house of Madame, and later Marie-Claude, seeking for deferral; a widely spread rumour among clones of Hailsham, which maintains that if two clones prove to the authority that they are genuinely in love, their donation could be delayed. Their request is made poignant by its modesty, for as Query (2015) observes: ‘far from seeking eternal life, [they] ask only a couple of years’ (167). There, unexpectedly, they meet Hailsham’s head Guardian, Miss Emily, who confesses:

‘Very well, sometimes that meant we kept things from you, lied to you. Yes, in many ways we *fooled* you. I suppose you could even call it that. But we sheltered you during those years, and we gave you your childhoods. Lucy was well-meaning enough. But if she’d had her way, your happiness at Hailsham would have been shattered’. (263) [emphasis in original]

From Miss Emily’s perspective, too much knowledge would have been to overburden these young minds, for she assumes the system would prevail and their deaths would still have been inevitable, whatever knowledge was imparted to them. She implies that to outline the detail of their fate would simply serve to assuage Miss Lucy’s own guilt. Notably, through these words, Miss Emily ventriloquises the author’s claim, as this section will argue at a later point. Indeed, these words strike both Kathy and Tommy, leaving them traumatically injured, but not equally so. For Kathy, she still sees herself as fitting in this inhumane system, even after this incident: ‘For the most part being a carer’s suited me fine. You could even say it’s brought the best out of me’ (203) while for Tommy his tantrums re-emerged. In offering an explanation for Tommy’s reversion, Kathy says, addressing him: ‘I was thinking maybe the reason you used to get like that was because at some level you always *knew.’* (270) [emphasis in original], referring to the falsehood and deception maintained in Hailsham.

**3.4. Hailsham: The Zone of Exception**

The underlying aim of Hailsham’s existence is to produce a submissive and confused individual coercively guided (or in blind faith) towards his/her fate: they will be literally sacrificed so others may continue to live healthier lives. Hence, Hailsham represents a pedagogical model (an ideological state apparatus in an Althusserian sense), in which education per se is not a priority, but rather aimed at the good health and physical development of these eventually-to-be-sacrificed clone children. They frequently undergo medical check-ups, and are strictly banned from harmful habits, such as smoking. The purpose is not their own well-being, but the best condition for the organs and other elements of their body that might prove useful surgically as donations. Any caring that is undertaken is focused on their ultimate fate: a preparation in both physical and psychological terms for butchery and death. Richard Bradford (2007) observes that this institution ‘appears to be a cross between an orphanage and an enlightened public school’, emphasising the apparent familiarity of the institution even given its ultimately grim function. As McDonald (2007) observes: ‘novels which depict schooling provide a fruitful forum by which the narrator’s agency in a complex power structure can be framed, questioned, and understood’ (77). Such normative expectations are overturned by Ishiguro so that boundaries of this kind are not negotiated but imposed in menacing fashion.

In his depiction of Hailsham, Ishiguro both subverts and incorporates the country house tradition of the British novel, a sub-genre he had already used, ironized and updated in *The Remains of the Day* (1989). In so doing, the novelist’s aesthetic subversion in this manner is considered by Barbara Williams (2015) a ‘progressive use of nostalgia’ and which John J. Su (2005) believes is used in the novel to ‘reject such essentialisms and to redefine key terms associated with national character’ (122). Su (2005) observes that Ishiguro and others who revisit this traditional form of the novel in contemporary times ‘seem to be quite aware of the dangers of nostalgia and yet nonetheless make it a central part of their narratives’ (11-12). For Christine Berberich (2011) though:

The text [*The Remains of the Day*] raises painful, but necessary, questions about the nature of Englishness and its supposedly glorious past. […] But the exploration of racism contains also a cautionary subtext that criticizes and warns against the dangerous social and moral regression enacted by Thatcherite celebration of Englishness and Victorian values and its refusal to acknowledge the nation’s darker life of the mind. (119)

 Berberich adds of the myths Ishiguro debunks that ‘what is ostensibly harmless nostalgia for the heyday of the English country house and other traditional institutions might, in fact, cover up dark secrets and unsavoury truths’ (128). These are precisely the elements Ishiguro adds in *Never Let Me Go,* where he portrays Hailsham as a home full of unpalatable underlying realities.

Hailsham, with its retrograde impression of an institution mired in the past, also serves as a historic marker of an earlier pre-war imperial era of Great Britain and its Empire, past and present. *Never Let Me Go* evokes the underlying violence associated with such properties. Louise Harrington (2007) refers to ‘how the comfort of the English gentleman’s house relies on the mysterious activities of imperialism’ (285), for in truth much of ‘the strength of England is derived from colonial lands’ (289). The country estate arguably represents one of the ultimate symbols of colonial (imperial) Britishness, of which Hailsham is a repurposed example. Rather than simply being regarded as part of a country house idyll and seat of national culture, Ishiguro uses the donor programme to subtly evoke and mirror colonial expansion and violence (against those regarded as less than human), which funded many such estates. For Lee (2019), this mirrors another ‘colonial intervention’ that is equally violent, dismissive and degrading of others, which he describes as ‘the colonization of clones through organ extraction [that] entails the loss of their physical bodies […]’ (227).

Yet Hailsham is still the clones’ childhood home despite the underlying traumatic realities, and it thus provides some sense of selfhood and comfort. In fact, Hailsham is initially perceived by Kathy as a utopian place that everyone wishes to inhabit, or at least ‘wants to hear about’ (5). However, as the novel progresses, this initial notion crumbles under the weight of knowledge gained by her about the underlying reality that she and her fellow inmates of this institution might be cared for on one level, yet they are treated as non-human. Kathy seems to realise this fact at an early age in Hailsham. Specifically, this occurs at the moment she and her friends pass Madame in an attempt to test Ruth’s theory, which claims that the Gallery representative is afraid of them:

Ruth had been right: Madame *was* afraid of us. But she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders. We hadn’t been ready for that. It had never occurred to us to wonder how we would feel, being seen like that, being the spiders. (35) [emphasis in original]

The reaction of Madame reflects the paradox of sovereignty. While she excludes the children by her gaze, she simultaneously includes them by collecting their artworks; a matter that puzzles Kathy’s friend Laura, who asks: “If [Madame] doesn’t like us, why does she want our work? Why doesn’t she just leave us alone? Who asks her to come here anyway?” (35-36). The question is for them unanswerable, and this indicates a condensation of the dynamics of a preference for exclusion being total rather than partial, which is the attitude subtending this confrontation. The child shows her frustration at being humiliated, and considered lesser, or othered in effect. Indeed, it is not the mere gaze of an older woman who regularly visits Hailsham for the sake of taking their artworks that traumatises them. Rather, it is the immediate and raw confrontation that disturbs the long-woven distance between the clones and the authentic human beings, exposing a curtain of mystification that conceals the Real from the clones’ perception, exploding a web of symbols and images upon which their consciousness has developed.

Surely, the episode concerning the taking of the clones’ artwork serves to undermine any residual notion of tolerance on the part of either the guardians or general population toward the clones. The simple logic of the mechanism underpinning this cultural separation is that society seeks to keep its victims at arm’s length: they are perceived as potentially disruptive and must be controlled. This produces a sense of the clones as victims of a series of traumas that others do not wish to acknowledge, and hence resistance to greater intolerance ensues. Perhaps, for this reason, one might not fully dismiss Žižek’s (2009) suggestion that ‘sometimes a dose of alienation is indispensable for peaceful coexistence. Sometimes alienation is not a problem but a solution’ (51). One should also bear in mind that such a proposal is not a total solution but an aggravation for those who are designated *homo sacer* by hegemonic forces, subjugating those, like the clones, who are denied autonomy or authority.

Therefore, the encounter with Madame is rendered a traumatic event through which Kathy uncovers a fundamental hostility directed toward them because of what Miss Emily describes as follows: “It’s one thing to create students, such as yourselves, for the donation programme. But a generation of created children who’d take their place in society? Children demonstrably *superior* to the rest of us? Oh no. That frightened people. They recoiled from that” (259) [emphasis in original]. This revelation’s effect upon Kathy is profound and long-lasting, as is the recollection of the disgust of Madame, which she recalls earlier at Hailsham when she recalls seeing the woman in a dreamlike collective state. Kathy narrates with great precision:

The afternoon Madame’s car was spotted coming across the fields, it was windy and sunny, with a few storm clouds to gather. We were in Room 9 – on the first floor at the front of the house […].

The plan we’d come up with to test Ruth’s theory was very simple: we – the six of us in on it – would lie in wait for Madame somewhere, then ‘swarm out’ all around her, all at once. […]

We loitered inside the main doorway. […] At a signal from Ruth we all sauntered out, moving straight for her, but like we were all in a dream. Only when she came to a stiff halt did we each murmur: ‘Excuse me, Miss,’ and separate. (34-35)

Their sense of embodied unreality here indicates an ontological distortion. The experience is finally ‘like walking past a mirror you’ve walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange’ (36). This is a defamiliarisation. However, this alteration does not influence Kathy’s ability to reclaim the incident. On the contrary, she provides an ultra-detailed narration of the whole episode, remembering the time and place of the occurrence supported by a multisensory effect. This episode also accords with Pederson’s (2014) notion that trauma may be recollected, and that ‘Traumatic memories, then, are not elusive or absent; they are potentially more detailed and more powerful than normal ones’ (339). Kathy’s seem so because she even recalls Madame’s clothes and exact movements: ‘[Madame] emerged from the car and came toward us, dressed in her usual grey suit, her briefcase held tightly to herself in both arms’ (35). Clearly, Kathy’s recollection of this confrontation is very powerful because trauma has dramatically enhanced her memory. Pederson (2014) argues that ‘literary critics [should be] open to the possibility that authors may record trauma with excessive detail and vibrant intensity’ (339), a possibility Ishiguro embraces. The intensity of Kathy’s observations also has a deleterious impact upon the other children too, since they become a ‘very different group from the one that had stood about excitedly waiting for Madame to get out of her car’ (35), at least according to Kathy.

Finally, for the non-clones, the children are mere imitations, simulations in a strict Baudrillardian sense. This creates an uncanny unease when they are encountered. Poignantly perhaps, this effect is inevitable, since the clones, whether in a group or when alone, are regarded as a category (rather than true individuals) and so their collective creatureliness (not fully human) becomes a matter of dread. This is arguably a fundamentally Gothic fear of what Flahault (2003) calls ‘something of the limitless, the monstrous’ (59). Madame’s reaction to the clones is one of disgust and fear: ‘I glanced at her face – as did the others, I’m sure. I can still see it now, the shudder she seemed to be suppressing, the real dread that one of us would accidentally brush against her’ (35). The source of such reaction is Hailsham itself since it signifies an indistinctive space – the zone of undecidability – which is a paradoxical phenomenon located neither within the city (the law) nor outcast in the woods (outside the law, the out of order, the omnipresence of evil, a chaotic space). Hence, the clones are not included as authentic human beings nor excluded completely, but a hybrid of both. There is an element of the Gothic in such responses, compelled and yet fearful and full of disgust. This is similar to fascination and repulsion of a type of figure Butler (1981) describes as ‘an evil familiar spirit, or *doppelganger* […]’ (158), but also a projection: a ‘study in the frightfulness of what may be within […]’ (159). This is also potential in the case of the clones, a condition of bare existence that is neither inside nor outside, hovering forever on the threshold of neither full inclusion nor full exclusion. In this sense, their life evokes the life of a werewolf, as according to Agamben (1995):

The life of the bandit, like that of the sacred man, is not a piece of animal nature without any relation to law and the city. It is, rather, a threshold of indistinction and of passage be-tween animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion: the life of the bandit is the life of the *loup* *garou*, the werewolf, who is precisely *neither* *man* *nor* *beast*, and who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither. (105) [emphasis in original]

Much like the werewolf, the clones are raised outside the city; a clear exclusion from the social life beyond Hailsham borders. Within this zone, the authority maintains the condition of permanent threat that is orchestrated by the Guardians, who represent the inner circle of the boarding school community.

**3.5. Metalanguage**

In terms of their interactions with the students, the Guardians tend to avoid any imaginary relations (in a Lacanian sense) since such a framework of intersubjectivity would lure them into the trap of an inescapable duality: either we are similar and therefore you are my friend, or you are different and so we are enemies (Fink, 1997, 84, 86). This does not mean the total absence of any such relations between the Guardians and the students, but the former are keen to distract the latter from any notion of such relations by presenting Hailsham as ‘the perfect object of love, neither smothering, nor absent’(Fink, 1997, 89). That is, there is a mother/child relationship between the children and their school. In interview with Tim Adams (2005), Ishiguro delineates this parental role of Hailsham in a more precise sense:

‘Hailsham is like a physical manifestation of what we have to do to all children […]. It is a protected world. To some extent at least you have to shield children from what you know and drip-feed information to them. Sometimes that is kindly meant, and sometimes not. When you become a parent, or a teacher, you turn into a manager of this whole system. You become the person controlling the bubble of innocence around a child, regulating it. All children have to be deceived if they are to grow up without trauma.’ (n.p)

Such a depiction, from a Lacanian perspective, fixes Hailsham as the main source of ontological nourishment for the students, causing them to crave its approval and love regardless of any given situation (Fink, 1997). This has a direct influence on the children’s desires, which evidently revolve entirely around their prime and absolute fascination, making Hailsham an infinitely present object. As Kathy narrates, ‘Driving around the country now, I still see things that will remind me of Hailsham’ (6). Indeed, this is part of the subtle art of indoctrination approved in Hailsham, and for which the Guardians are assigned, using the language of the Real. That is, there is a metalanguage used which locates itself in the gap of the text, and thus ‘one cannot *attain* it, but one also cannot *escape* it’ (Žižek, 2008, 175) [emphasis in original]. This is evident in the assembly speeches given by the head Guardian, Miss Emily, when children misbehave. According to Kathy:

There was a real sense of feeling bad that we had, in some collective way, let down Miss Emily, but try as we might, we couldn’t really follow these lectures. It was partly her language. ‘Unworthy of privilege’ and ‘misuse of opportunity’: these were two regular phrases Ruth and I came up with when we were reminiscing […]. Her general drift was clear enough: we were all very special, being Hailsham students, and so it was all the more disappointing when we behave badly. […] She might then resume with a gentle sigh – a signal that we were going to be forgiven – or just as easily explode out of her silence with: ‘But I will not be coerced! Oh no! And neither will Hailsham!’. (42-43)

The very reference to ‘privilege’ is ironic considering the clones’ fate. However, the first impression of such a word is undoubtedly a positive one. It generates a web of positive symbolisations clustering around the denoted object. Yet these words are meaningless when this same person comes closer to the clones’ life, as the given image will disappear. This is precisely the language of the Real in its fullness. Each word used to describe the clones embodies an emptiness that cannot be filled, regardless of whether the word is negative or positive. And by its very emptiness, the word penetrates the clones, provoking in them the sense of *jouissance.* The same method of indoctrination is used to normalise the donation programme for the clones. Kathy recollects the following: ‘One thing that occurs to me now is that when the guardians first started giving us proper lectures about sex, they tended to run them together with talk about donation. […] Now to be fair, it was probably natural to run these two subjects together’ (81). This key utterance illustrates the basic paradox of the Trojan horse technique, which relies on the phallus object that castrates its recipient. This object is precisely the void of the text, which the symbolic order clusters around. While sex is an object of desire, donation is the void, an *object petit a*.That is, the original reference relates through negation to all other objects depicted in the text. In other words, sex becomes the sign of an absent object, which is donation. It is the phallic signifier, always returning to it: the Real. Hence, donation is an internal object, but excluded by its lack and its own impossibility to be filled by other objects. This type of object, as Žižek (2008) notes, is ‘the Real as the starting point, the basis, the foundation of the process of symbolization’, an original one, as the whole structure of the signifying texture relies upon it.

 The other type, however, precisely takes an opposite form because the signifying texture produces the object. An example of this takes place outside Hailsham’s boundaries when Kathy and her friends, along with a couple of veterans, go to Norfolk searching for Ruth’s ‘possible’; a theory, among many others, invented by the clones of Hailsham, which hypotheses the possibility of the clone as being a duplicate of one of the ‘normal’ people. Although this hypothesis appears to have no factual grounding (rather it appears to be a mere illusion on the part of the clones), the veterans became intertwined in the fantasy of the Hailsham’s clones, transforming the theory into a source of fascination. Thus, they are the one who find the possible of Ruth:

because Ruth was from Hailsham, somehow the whole notion came within the realms of the possible. That’s how Chrissie [a veteran] saw it, and I suppose Ruth did say a few things every now and then to encourage the idea that, sure enough, in some mysterious way, a separate set of rules applied to us Hailsham students. I never heard Ruth actually lie to veterans; it was more to do with not denying certain things, implying others. (143)

Clearly, Chrissie’s inner object is caught in this web of symbolization produced by the newcomer, so much so that these veterans join Kathy, Tommy and Ruth in search of the latter’s possible. And thus, the possible as an object is produced after a series of failures, which represents a surplus of the very act of repeating the same subject of conversation in metalanguage: straightforward language in which the gap between the signifier and the literal meaning is impossible to initially assess, or if identified to rectify the linguistic distortion. However, once they find the nominated possible, the whole structure of symbolisation disappears.

It is within this inner object that guilt is located, since according to Agamben (1995): ‘guilt is […] first of all a “process of inner life,” which is to say, something essentially “intrasubjective,” which can be qualified as a real “ill will” that consists in “knowingly positing ends contrary to those of the juridical order”’ (27). By being beyond the bounds of society curiously the clones remind everyone else of a profound guilt about their status and condition that others would rather repress. Even the complicity of the clones cannot efface this ever present but subliminal meaning for others of their being. In this sense, one can return to and understand the immediacy of Kathy’s self-identifying at the beginning of her narration, which arguably becomes an attitude of perverting the presupposed readerly question “who are you?” when faced with a narrator. Such a response serves primarily to avoid the violent nature embedded in the performance of asking that engenders feelings of guilt and shame, since it has an obscene side by which the subject is undesirably exposed. Žižek (2008) offers an explanation to this dimension by referring to Aron Bodenheimer’s book *Why? On the Obscenity of Questioning*, as he says that:

there is something obscene in the very act of asking a question, without regard to its content. It is the form of the question as such which is obscene: the question lays open, exposes, denudes its addressee, it invades his sphere of intimacy; this is why the basic, elementary reaction to a question is shame on the bodily level, blushing and lowering our eyes, like a child of whom we ask ‘What were you doing?’. (202)

The question therefore imposes itself violently upon the percipients, penetrating their core by its force. Its persistence on penetrating the addressee (to be received), divides his/her existence, and thus provokes feelings of shame and guilt. Hence, such an interrogation does not demand an actual answer, but rather it seeks for a reception; to confirm the subject’s impotence against this outward force of authority embedded in the question itself. The clones are confronted similarly by the facts of harvesting and all that this implies. It is not only an indication of an early death, but also serves as a constant reminder of both the centrality and subjugation of the clones in this process that limits their future.

 Questioning is a common feature in tyrannical systems, which serves dominatory ends efficiently but viciously. According to Žižek (2008): ‘Questioning is the basic procedure of the totalitarian intersubjective relationship […]. Totalitarian power is not a dogmatism which has all the answers; it is, on the contrary, the instance which has all the questions’ (203). To demonstrate this, Žižek (2008) substitutes the power relations by using the example of a child asking his father, noting that: ‘the stake of such a question is always to catch the other who embodies authority in his impotence, in his inability, in his lack’ (203). In essence, such a question coerces the addressee to tell of what should not be spoken.

 Such a type of question (that is, of inversive power) is offered in the novel during one of the oft-repeated talks about the danger of smoking. When ‘we were nine or ten’ (69) a child clone from Hailsham named Marge K asks Miss Lucy if she ‘had herself ever had a cigarette’, which Kathy regards as akin to asking ‘if Miss Lucy had attacked anyone with an axe’ (68). Symbolically, this image of an axe attack conveys the children’s distaste for explicit violence, but at an unconscious level mirrors the violence that subtends their existence, and the true relation of the Guardians towards them. One senses the clones might not even be capable of overt violence in order to defend themselves, so entrenched is the subtle brainwashing they have undergone. In response to Marge’s question, Miss Lucy confirms that she “did smoke for a little while”, emphasising to the clones that smoking for them is ‘much, much worse […] than it ever was for [her]’ (68), yet without giving a precise reason to such a stress. Her disinclination to explain reveals her incapacity to utter the unspoken – the Thing – that the aim of the smoking ban is not only better health but ultimately improved organ harvesting from a healthier donor. Thus, Marge’s question leaves Miss Lucy’s impotence in the face of this fact, penetrating her being traumatically. Reporting its effect, Kathy says: ‘Then [Miss Lucy] paused and went quiet. Someone said later she’d gone off into a daydream’ (68). Clearly, Marge’s question attacks Miss Lucy’s inner object that derives from the external Real. It holds her as accountable for the prohibition in a negative way. However, as the Thing overwhelms her, Miss Lucy reinforces her authority by her partial revelations to the clones, using the illusion of presumed knowledge. Kathy remembers Miss Lucy’s words as follows: “You’ve been told about it. You’re students. You’re … *special*. So keeping yourselves well, keeping yourselves very healthy inside, that’s much more important for each of you than it is for me” (68) [emphasis in original]. Here, Miss Lucy stresses a word repeatedly used by those in authority to impose a sense of guilt in the children, castrating them symbolically.

As Flahualt (2003) indicates, the monstrous is intimately conjoined to ‘transgression and punishment […]. Punishment, in its most frightening form, is the effect of a necessary and imminent reversal, that of a dream changing into a nightmare’ (59). Indeed, in Hailsham, where the state of emergency is active, evil must be multiplied by transposing it into a mythical monster that has unlimited power outside the authority’s restriction. In fact, the real threat stems from within its boundaries. The ‘horrible stories about the wood’ (50) offer an example of such diabolic fables that uncannily haunt the clones, discouraging them from exploration or escape, preventing them from choosing other trajectories throughout their lives. Kathy describes several transgressions as leading to several deaths, and a bodily mutilation, a gruesome, quasi-Gothic account:

 Once, not so long before we all got to Hailsham, a boy had had a big row with his friends and run off beyond the Hailsham Boundaries. His body had been found two days later, up in those woods, tied to a tree with the hands and feet chopped off. Another rumour has it that a girl’s ghost wandered through those trees. She’d been a Hailsham student until one day she’d climbed over a fence just to see what it was like outside. This was a long time before us, when the guardians were much stricter, cruel even, and when she tried to get back in, she wasn’t allowed. She kept hanging around outside the fences, pleading to be back in, but no one let her. Eventually, she’d gone off somewhere out there, something had happened and she’d died. But her ghost was always wandering about the woods, gazing over Hailsham, pining to be let back. (50)

Pervading the narrative is a sense of indifference toward those who breach the rules or, literally in this case, boundaries. Each detail evidently incorporates an evil feature drawn from the basis of the system, which emphasizes danger and obedience through a mixture of familiarity and unfamiliarity that boosts its uncanny effect (hence the ghostly, a haunting initiated by an act of transgression). It also specifically involves the deformation of a boy’s body which denotes (symbolically and through the incisions required) organ donation, and the girl’s transformation into a ghost is interchangeable with the ultimate fate of all clones: death. In this case the fate is mythologised, prone to rumour and fear. Ironically, ‘The guardians always insisted these stories were nonsense,’ (50), but not only is such a negation unconvincing and cursory, the Guardians allow the older pupils to circulate and embellish them. As Žižek (2009) asserts: ‘the evil is a part of the inner circle itself: it is *imagined* by its members’ (23) [emphasis in original]. Thus, the feeling of terror still haunts the clones even within the borders of the constructed authority, since Kathy says: ‘The woods played on our imaginations the most after dark, in our dorms as we were trying to sleep’ (50), which illustrates the vulnerability caused by these stories to the children that expose them to self-annihilation.

The influence of a story upon an individual is indeed profoundly intense, since it addresses the subject of existence in the addressee, not the subject of knowledge (which does not entail the risk of existing). A child is more prone to its impact than others, as his/her inner object is still in a developmental phase whereby aspects of identity are explored in the search for authentic self. According to Flahualt (2003), ‘the true *self*, the “authentic person”, is not an inborn kernel, but that it is constituted as the child sets foot in a common world, a world where he or she is defined in relation to others, a world which enables the child gradually to assume consistency’ (41) [emphasis in original]. Thus, irrational terror is common among children, as they consume all the terrifying elements (especially those corresponding to the child’s world) of any horror story. Flahault himself experienced this irrational terror as a child after watching *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957)*,* which includes details resembling the coal cellar in his house. Despite his knowledge that such a creature does not exist, whenever young Flahault went downstairs to complete his daily assigned task, Frankenstein’s monster invades his consciousness to put him in a state of boundless fear. This feeling of terror, which resurfaced whenever he descends to the basement, helped Flahault to cast light on the boundary that divides two opposing spaces: the basement, where this all-invading creature maintains disorder by his omnipresent threat; and the rest of the house, where his family preserved order. This division is not a physical one, but rather exists within the subject itself; a Lacanian perspective. Hence, the person presupposes themselves as an existent being or an alien according to this split that is stimulated by external elements, such as space, language, people, and/or incidents, and by which the individual acts/reacts accordingly.

**3.6. Empathy and Collective Memory**

Kathy treasures an old cassette tape, which signifies for David James (2008) ‘Ishiguro’s concern with memory and belonging’ (129). Later she remembers Madame in tears, responding to a song that was playing in the Art Room, the volume loud and insistent. Kathy is caught dancing with a pillow substituting for the baby of the song, as she imagines naively is its meaning. She misinterprets the ‘“Baby, baby, baby, never let me go …”’ (70) of the song, which surely refers to a lover rather than an infant, and this evokes a visceral response in the older woman. Its overall significance seems evident for it provides the very title of the novel. In this instance, the traumatic imbalance of Madame is not expressed in the form of terror (as one finds in the example of the horror stories that circulate detailed above), but as pity (Flahault, 2003).

After this incident, the tape goes missing, making Kathy distraught. She admits that ‘The truth is, I suppose, there was far more thieving going on at Hailsham than we – or the guardians – ever wanted to admit’ (74). The utopia is fragmenting even in her memory, and such a description alludes to her inability to comprehend this event. In her discussion about the episode with Tommy, Kathy seems incapable of identifying how Madame understands her plight, quite devoid it would appear of any comprehension of how empathy functions. This is a result of the competitive aggression and self-absorption inculcated subtly at Hailsham. As Zuzana Fonioková (2015) asserts, ‘The lack of clarity in some of [Kathy’s] memories only emphasizes her humanlike quality and her strenuous effort to render as precise a picture as possible of her fellow clones’ past’ (14). Ruth would seem to be far more empathic than Kathy, at least instinctively, for she replaces the tape with another (of a different kind of music) that she finds with difficulty. Shaddox (2013) identifies exactly this kind of interaction as being crucial in both situating and interpreting this novel appropriately, explaining that ‘Empathy and sympathy are psychologically complex states, involving an outpouring of feeling toward another. […] Unlike sympathy, ‘empathy’ involves imagining and seeking to understand the perspective of another person’ (462). Ruth’s effort and attention forces Kathy to understand her friend’s compassion and to admit to herself that ‘suddenly I felt the disappointment ebbing away and being replaced by a real happiness’ (75). As James (2008) highlights, ‘Ishiguro suggests that although the most ordinary objects are often backlit by the pleasures and ravages of the past, they need not always be solicited as stale artefacts to what might have been’ (129). However, according to Shaddox (2013), the tape is far more reductive as perceived by Tommy, for whom it merely ‘becomes a material fetish from which to generate emotional—here, potentially romantic—experiences’ (456). Ruth animates other possibilities by her intervention, and therefore this moment might be regarded as pivotal, or at least highly significant for Kathy, despite her being far slower in her development of even a residual understanding of empathy.

The gift given signifies far more though. As Lewis Hyde (2009) notes, ‘[in] the bonding power of gifts and the detached nature of commodity exchange, gifts have become associated with community and with being obliged to others, while commodities are associated with alienation and freedom’ (86). Similarly, in her acceptance of her role as a carer, Kathy values and prioritises obligation and the communitarian despite the othering of the clones by the public at large. There is a further element to Ruth’s unbidden and compassionate gift, the binding together of a spiritual possibility. As Marcel Mauss (1966) argues, ‘to give something is to give a part of oneself. [...] One gives away a part of one’s nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone’s spiritual essence’ (10). In this sense, Kathy’s relationship with Ruth, at an implicit, unconscious and symbolic level, becomes far more profound than even that with her lover, Tommy. This is shown quite early in Kathy’s narration:

[T]he instant I saw her [Ruth] again, at that recovery centre in Dover, all our differences – while they didn’t exactly vanish – seemed not nearly as important as all the other things: like the fact that we’d grown up together at Hailsham, the fact that we know and remembered things no one else did. It’s ever since then, I suppose, I started seeking out for my donors people from the past, and whenever I could, people from Hailsham. (4)

Indeed, Kathy’s choice of people from Hailsham to care for evokes the shared experience of trauma survivors that is beyond the comprehension of others. As Victor Frankl (2004), a concentration camp survivor and psychotherapist, notes, ‘It is easy for the outsider to get the wrong conception of camp life, a conception mingled with sentiment and pity. Little does he know of the hard fight for existence which raged among the prisoners’ (18). Therefore, no one else has the capability to assign the proper and informed value to the agony and suffering witnessed in similar conditions and traumatic events but the victims themselves. However, fearing an inappropriate public response (even one of pity) might well prevent victims from telling their stories. Pederson (2014) describes that ‘[listening to combat veterans] recounting stories of war trauma is wrenching and difficult. But its difficulty springs not from some psychological inability to recall or restate, but from the reactions the soldiers expect from their neighbours and loved ones’ (342) some of whom make them feel like monsters. Among fellow veterans, however, they can unburden themselves by rendering the experiences as a storied written account, often ‘strikingly detailed’ (Pederson, 2014, 343). Thus, it is by having endured similar traumatic experiences as inmates in this particular institution that frames and shapes the clones’ lives: Kathy is compelled to be fond of and drawn to people from Hailsham, most especially Ruth, about whom she writes to redress the past.

Importantly, in the introduction of Frankl’s book (2004), he asserts that his testimony does not describe events that took ‘place in large and famous camps, but in the small ones where most of the real extermination took place’ (17), suggesting that each camp has its own exceptional story. Such variation between concentration camps has a parallel in Ishiguro’s novel, illustrated in the clones’ response towards their various different boarding schools. For example, the unnamed donor, who was under Kathy’s supervision in her third year as a carer and is the one who triggers her memories in the first place, shows no desire to be reminded of the place where he was raised when asked by Kathy. Reporting his reaction, Kathy narrates: ‘his face beneath the blotches went into a completely new kind of grimace. And I realized then how desperately he didn’t want to be reminded’ (5). Strikingly, however, ‘What he wanted was not just to hear about Hailsham, but to *remember* Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood’ (5) [emphasis in original], or so he wishes according to Kathy’s account. For Query (2015), this ‘is, in fact, the point at which she commits to a painstaking act of remembering. […] Kathy, in turn, realizes that by working her own memories into a story she can help to bring her life to a kind of completion’ (170). This unnamed donor’s desire to reconstruct a false memory speaks by implication perhaps to a collective memory of trauma that can be inherited from direct survivors such as Kathy, linking those who have not seen Hailsham like this patient to wider coordinates of suffering, a community of implied victimhood. However, this projection (and replacement of the personal historicity of certain subjects) might well risk the actuality of the event and its real nature. According to Gilad Hirschberger (2018):

subsequent generations of trauma survivors, that never witnessed the actual events, may remember the events differently than the direct survivors, and then the construction of these past events may take different shape and form from generation to generation. (1)

This is evident in the patient’s reaction when he knows the home in which Kathy grew up. He says: “Hailsham. I bet that was a beautiful place” (5).[[23]](#footnote-24) Although this description is far from reality, the collective memory sustains the core substance of a myth (in this instance of Hailsham), replete with details of the way in which the environment functioned. Its signification is remembered shifting subtly between successive generations, as some regard the witnessing process of the concentration camps, something for many beyond comprehension, especially its quotidian practices and rhythms. Ishiguro incorporates such unbelievably banal realities in the evocation of the life of his clones marked out for death, detailing the everyday coordinates and the inconsequential details. Those who were incarcerated comprehend the curious acculturation with the unspeakable that occurs. The same is true for the clones. Tommy’s negative attitude towards Kathy, with its implicit rejection of her stance, after visiting Madame’s house encapsulates such an understanding, since he insistently says to her: ‘“Ruth would have understood. She was a donor, so she would have understood. […] You don’t see it because you’re not a donor”’ (276). Here Tommy affirms the individuality of victimhood. As for Kathy, her lack of understanding not only highlights her inability to empathise, but also reveals the embedded contradiction underpinning her professional career: she romanticises its autonomy quite early in the novel.

One might concur with Query's (2015) observation of Kathy at the end: ‘The novel’s final pages show her with a briefly entertained longing, not for a future but for a lost past, a longing quickly subjugated to the mundane demands of the day’ (170). At the end of the novel, Kathy finds herself while thinking of Tommy, now dead, staring across ‘acres of ploughed earth’ (281) separated by a fence that is literal and symbolic. The dream of a larger meaning or greater intimacy is reduced and set alongside another symbol of ‘strange rubbish’ (282), flapping in the branches of a tree and ‘caught along the fencing’ (282), where even the fantasy of seeing Tommy again is now dismissed by Kathy, a final moment of resignation and complete alienation.

This chapter has examined the political figure of *homo sacer* in Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*. The first section discussed the significance of Bildungsroman in relation to class struggle, trauma narration, and the element of immediacy. As previously stated, Ishiguro subverts this sub-genre by restricting Kathy’s agency and determining her self-progression through space instead of time to accentuate her abjection. The argument in the section ‘Simulated Ethics and Aesthetics’ focused on Kathy’s career, which she idealises by emphasising both her relationship with donors and her self-sacrifice despite her powerlessness and lack of influence. Nonetheless, being a carer renders a sense of enjoyment for her, which this section denotes as *jouissance*. Such ingrained contradictions suggest that obtaining professional autonomy as a carer is impossible. Tommy, by contrast, achieves a real sense of unity through his art that challenges the system’s artificial creativity despite being excluded for not conforming to the aesthetical standard defined by the system. As for Kathy, she obtains a sense of recognition by being a loyal and adherent agent since she says: ‘I do know for a fact they’ve been pleased with my work […]’ (1). Yet such recognition is limited and never grants Kathy an equal right to that given to authentic human beings. This fact highlights the clones’ maximized vulnerability. Hailsham’s location, which this chapter has interpreted as the zone of exception, emphasises such a precarious condition. It is neither inside nor outside the city, and the clones must remain within vague borders to remain invisible from the public lest they provoke fear and disgust.

 In terms of trauma and its effect on victims’ memory, this chapter has suggested that traumatic memories are potentially more vivid and intense than ordinary recollections. This is not the case with collective memory since the narrative of actual events by successive generations may incorporate mythical elements. Indeed, this demonstrates the individuality of victimhood. In the section on ‘Metalanguage’, the discussion focused on the type of language employed to indoctrinate the clones and which situates Hailsham as an ideal place. This section is particularly important, as the analysis contained within the following chapter will rely upon the ideas and principles introduced here. It has been shown that the system in Ishiguro’s novel exploits the clones by reducing their existence to a precarious one, shuttering any hope for autonomy. As Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau (2017) observe: ‘vulnerability appears as the condition that makes autonomy impossible, the situation in which the self manifests itself in relation to some constrictive other’ (3). This is evident in Kathy’s narration as she is utterly reliant on her connection with others, especially Hailsham. Such passiveness is also evident in Crace’s narrative, as Walter constantly emphasises his affinity with his Master. In both cases the slave/master relation is evident.

In the following chapter, a character eager to challenge the system and gain autonomy is considered. As Claire Allen (2020) comments on the characterisation of Thomson’s protagonist: ‘Novels such as *Divided Kingdom* (2005) […] reinstate heroes and heroines, character types which can also read in the light of a neo-humanist thinking, as the function of the hero can be understood in relation to principles of searching for universal (or at least societal) good as opposed to singular self-interest’ (17). Such positivity seems at times overwhelmed by alienation and a set of individual and cultural sites of victimisation, as the following chapter aims to illustrate.

**Chapter Four: Alienation in Rupert Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom***

The previous two chapters have studied victimhood from two well-defined perspectives: the religious and the political. In both analyses, the theme of alienation surfaces as a symptomatic feature, drawn from a general discomfort that permeates the given fictional societies as the result of an imposed division (villagers and outsiders in *Harvest*, clones and the rest of humanity in *Never Let Me Go*). In further progressing the critique, this chapter considers Rupert Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom* in which the whole of the United Kingdom (as initially explained in the Chapter One) is split into four nations that are eventually seen to be grounded in arbitrary interpretations of their residents’ predispositions. In this condition, alienation deepens the divide between members of society so that they become more vulnerable, eliminating any potential for empathy and understanding. Therefore, reconciliation is inconceivable, since the opportunity to engage in dialogue is not present. The initial analysis is divided into two sections that are contextual in nature: Concepts and Theories of Alienation and Ideological Control. Two further key sections progress toward a fuller understanding of the substance and impact of alienation in Thomson’s novel: Reconstructing the Social Formation and Towards the Final Stage.

**4.1. Concepts and Theories of Alienation**

 The aim of this chapter is to closely scrutinise alienation and examine the conditions that prevent individuals in capitalist societies from ‘the real *appropriation* *of the* *human* essence’(Marx & Engels, 2009, 102) [emphasis in original], explored as fictionalized in Rupert Thomson’s novel *Divided Kingdom* (2005). This chapter considers how his dystopian creates a structural paradigm of rearranging people in Britain according to their humours (as detailed below). By deploying a satirical approach to the form of his fictional society, in effect Thomson addresses how people tend to regard contemporary British social issues by stressing both the limitations of human beings and the hubris many have regarding their reading of and solutions for (often either utopian or ungrounded in reality) our existence in an essentially alienated and alienating cultural milieu. In such a predominantly capitalist condition, the individual’s life becomes dominated by forces or relations aligned with the Marxian concept of social alienation, or humans’ estrangement from their essence. This surfaces in four forms: alienation from the product of labour, alienation from the activity of labour, alienation from one’s own specific humanity, and alienation from others (Marx & Engels, 2009). For Marx (2009), there is a diminishment of being because the political economy can be regarded as ‘a true moral science, the most moral of all the sciences. Self-denial, the denial of life and of all human needs, is its cardinal doctrine. […] The less you *are*, the more you *have*; the less you express your own life, the greater is your *alienated* life – the greater is the store of your estranged being’ (118-119) [emphasis in original]. All these types of alienation are stressed in the world of *Divided Kingdom*.

After the initial publication of Thomson’s novel, reviewers soon identified certain oddities in the protagonist’s role in the administration of the newly constituted regime of the Red Quarter. These indicate a certain resistance to feeling any empathy for others. This becomes more notable when Thomas undergoes a literal and somewhat unexpected epiphany. Anna Scott (2006) notes that ‘This somewhat prescriptive remedy for the evils of celebrity-obsessed society beset with overflowing prisons, teenage pregnancies and a propensity to lynch suspected child molesters is whole-heartedly endorsed by youthful civil servant Thomas Parry’ (n.p.). Additionally, as Carl Wilkinson (2005) notes in an earlier review, having adapted to his new family and name, Thomas becomes part of a privileged elite in that he joins the central administration of the system: ‘He goes to university, then becomes a civil servant involved in the ongoing process of psychological testing and relocation of members of the population who fail to meet the demands of his quarter. Throughout, his sanguine personality renders him almost boring in his normality’ (n.p.). As Thomson explains to Andrew Lawless (n.d.): ‘“Thomas is an artificial construct. […] He is someone who has been created by the State, and he is a microcosm of that State. One of the central dynamics of the book is Thomas’s various attempts to work out the difference between what he used to be and what he has become”’ (1). The spatial division of territory impacts on the consciousness of the citizens as do the supposed principles of humours. As Steve Pile (2013) suggests, one might argue that ‘place is a social construction and that there is a fundamental link between place and identity’ (55) that could be forecasted in the people’s habitual behaviours.

The novel reveals the authorities imposing a typology of human characteristics upon the population, who are divided according to a pseudo-science (so in essence at random) in a process labelled the ‘Rearrangement’. The aim of this political project is to solve the national problem of violence by reorganising the existing traditional and conventional social arrangements and displacing the population into four geographic Quarters of Britain and the capital, each assigned a colour: Yellow, Red, Green and Blue. As the eight-year-old narrator and protagonist, Matthew Micklewright, redesignated as Thomas Parry, discovers after being taken from his family home and placed into a holding centre for children and school, this division has been undertaken ‘not according to economic status or social position, not according to colour, race or creed, but according to *psychology*, according to *type.* […] Miss Groves turned to the blackboard and wrote THE HUMOURS in block capitals. She asked whether any of us knew what the words meant. No one did’ (9) [emphasis in original]. In addition to these politically recognised traits, there is a group of uncategorised people called the White People, who conform to none of the types and who are therefore tolerated (albeit with a certain animosity exhibited towards them) in all Quarters of the Divided Kingdom without any assigned identity. They are distinguished primarily from residents of the four Quarters by their white cloaks and nomadic lifestyle. They travel in isolated groups (more like herds), shelter in abandoned buildings, use unknown paths, and gather food. They lack the ability to speak, which prevents any genuine communication between them and the rest of the society. They exist outside the symbolic order, and perhaps for this reason the government allows them to cross the borders of all the four Quarters freely. Their simultaneous existence, outside and inside the system, confers upon them the status of *homo sacer*, as this chapter will discuss in more detail below.

 After the ‘Rearrangement’, the principles of the humours and their associated psychological traits increasingly come to be seen once again as fundamental to human character and well-being. According to the narrator:

Once the population had been split into four groups, the land was divided to accommodate them. What had been until then a united kingdom was broken down into four separate and autonomous republics. New borders were created. New infrastructures too. New loyalties. (11)[[24]](#footnote-25)

Hence, the novel addresses various contemporary social beliefs and conditions in devolved regionalisms mirroring larger nationalisms (other states of belonging and allegiance) in the United Kingdom. It does so by exposing and, at times, parodying the underlying principles of these beliefs and thereby teasing out their implications for contemporary Britain through exaggeration. And yet as Piatti and Hurni (2009) observe, ‘the spatial division between the four quarters seems to be rather arbitrary and we can perceive only little correlation between the real geography and the four types of humours’ (340). However, this arbitrariness is arguably a core and guiding principle of the Rearrangement and the new order of control. Jonathan Greenberg in *Modernism, Satire, and the Novel* (2011), provides a definition of satire as a genre including ‘a moral aim as a necessary component of the mode’ (3) and which ‘paints its targets as deviating from a strong and stable set of communally held beliefs and at least implicitly urges reform’ (3). Similarly, for Lisa Colletta (2003), satire features and explores ‘alienation, uncertainty, instability, mechanization, and fragmentation—through a grim form of comedy […]’ (2). Further, she argues that from the modernist period onward satire offers little optimism, rather ‘it presents violent or traumatic events and questions the values and perceptions of its readers as it represents, simultaneously, the horrifying and the humorous’ (2). Such are the primary satirical coordinates and dynamics of Thomson’s novel with its challenging and bizarre social matrix.

**4.2. Ideological Control**

One underlying feature of *Divided Kingdom* is the concept of social engineering through government policy, the explicit way of enacting such changes in the current political order. This reality is made evident by this fictional world’s clumsy and semi-archaic ways of restructuring society. That is to say, efforts are made to influence mass behaviour in certain directions by using repressive and/or ideological apparatuses which fail to address various characteristics of the individual that are inconvenient for a capitalist system geared toward consumption, production and profit. Political and economic power both involve the exploitation of the population, and as Althusser (2014) notes, ‘Capitalist relations of production are relations of capitalist exploitation’ (29). Hence, the unspoken aim of such a divisive capitalism is to inculcate and to enhance the power of labour extraction (which is also a dynamic featured in both *Harvest* and *Never Let Me Go*). Despite Thomas’s initial conformity noted by earlier reviewers, on closer scrutiny, in his unconscious mind a degree of incipient alienation seems self-evident and bubbles up as an awareness of underlying unease of a dimension missing in his everyday life sensed initially in dreams that he fails to recall:

I had been in the middle of a dream, but the dream had faded, leaving nothing except the dimly remembered sensation of a cold wind blowing against my skin, and even then, still half-asleep, I knew that the partial and elusive nature of that memory would frustrate me, and that I would carry that feeling around with me all day. […] What was it about these hints and glimpses that disturbed me so. (78)

Although he appears initially comfortable with his professional life, gradually it becomes evident that Thomas is unable to settle into a socio-governmental system even though it is one in which he appears at least superficially to believe. This is precisely because the radical change that the system has brought about foregrounds the fragility of the human structures upon which individuals depend. In addition, due to the underlying struggle of losing his previous family, he has subsequently normalised the situation to be able to survive and adapt to a scenario with no apparent alternative.

Thomas’s narrative is framed as a Bildungsroman, featuring the journey of his life within an emergent and strict system. He first attends Thorpe Hall, a boarding school segregated by gender. Its educationists, much like those at Hailsham in Ishiguro’s narrative, dominate the mind of the children with suggested tropes pervading their thinking and attitudes, and so they inculcate a radical ideology whereby the ultimate ambition and intention is to exclude the other. Children learn their new affiliations when they are told, for instance, that they are to be addressed by ‘a highly distinguished man and that we should all be on our best behaviour’ (6):

‘Children of the Red Quarter.’ he said, and a thrill went through every one of us. We didn’t know what the man meant exactly, but clearly he was referring to us. […]

 In his speech he told us we should be proud of ourselves. ‘You’re to be admired,’ he said, ‘because you’re rare. Although there are only a few of you, your significance cannot be over-estimated. The future depends on the example you set to others. One might even say that the fate of the entire nation rests in your hand.’ (6)

Such an ideological process breeds aggressive youths who are indifferent to other groups in society. Yet, the duty of this kind of education is not merely to indoctrinate children with radical affiliations, but also to prepare them to be used by the authorities beyond the frontiers of school. Once children finish their course at Thorpe Hall, they are inserted into non-biological families, where they are used as spies on their fellow family members by the authorities.

The Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) at the heart of Divided Kingdom incorporates violent protective measures that can deployed for the security of the state rather than its citizens. We can see this in the novel when Thomas reflects on one particular aspect of this process:

In the Yellow Quarter, for instance, where resistance to the new regime was at its strongest, not a day passed without somebody being shot dead for trying to escape. In the Green Quarter, on the other hand, a number of people killed themselves, leaving notes and letters which claimed the government had deprived them of the will to live […]. (28)

Ironically, circulation of the news of such responses conveys the strength of the supposed truth subtending the system of humours. ISAs, on the other hand, as the name implies, include various institutions that serve the main ideology and the interests of an owner of a unit of production (such as Master Jordan in *Harvest*, who creates a hegemonic condition in the unnamed village), which are a deterrent to any other configuration of the mode of production (Althusser, 2014) and include the media. While RSA is subjective and its direction comes from the upper class that dominates and exploits the proletariat, ISAs do not require explicit violence to function. They have a greater affinity with the more subtle coercion of Bourdieu's (1996) habitus and its space of the possible, coordinates of which in Thomson’s narrative would include the stories of the two kinds of deaths described above as purveyed in the media. Rather, part of the purpose (and existence) of ISAs is to support the ultimate aim of RSA, since according to Althusser (2014), ‘All Ideological State Apparatuses without exception contribute to the same end: the reproduction of the relation of production, that is, of capitalist relations of exploitation’ (144). However, one should pay attention here, as the violent feature of the RSA does not mean it has no underlying ideology. Rather, ideology comes as secondary element. This ideology is known as ‘the Primary Ideology’, whereas the ISAs are a ‘subordinate Ideology’ (Althusser, 2014, 83). In *Divided Kingdom*, the ‘Rearrangement’ launches the primary ideology of the new system, while media, education, the family, and the law incorporate the secondary ideology. Thomas informs the reader that, ‘an Internal Security Act was simultaneously passed in all four countries. Anybody suspected of “undermining the fabric of society” could now be arrested on unspecific charges and held without trial for up to two years’ (28). Violence is present in both types of ideologies, yet one is observable and blatant while in the other it is not so evident (in the first case entailing your death, in the second your incarceration for a significant period with no judicial process).

Once Thomas graduates from university, the Ministry of Health and Social Security offers him a job to work secretly with an official committee that is responsible for transferring individuals from one Quarter to another. In taking up his post, he re-encounters Miss Groves, who works at the Ministry, and Thomas is reminded of ‘the fairy tale where the grandmother is actually a wolf’ (30). She interrogates him about his family, initially focusing on his new father. Thomas narrates:

I trusted him more, even though he had been trying to hide things from me. I felt that his lie was visible whereas hers was not and I decided that while it would be politic to appear to be cooperating, I would say as little as possible.

‘It’s difficult,’ I said.

Miss Groves leaned forward hungrily, as I suspected she might. ‘Really? And why’s that?’

‘I don’t see much of him. He’s working hard, for the railways.’ […]

‘And your sister, Marie? What about Marie?’

‘We get on really well.’

‘No sign of melancholy?’ Miss Groves said casually.

I shook my head.

‘No hints of phlegm or choler?’

‘No.’ (30-31)

The change in Thomas’s attitude is telling, as the reader senses his affiliation to the system is increasingly challenged and has underlying limitations that surface. Hence, new loyalties or world views begin to develop, which will eventually undermine his loyalty to the state.

 After gaining the trust of the authorities, Thomas represents the Red Quarter as a delegate sent to a conference that include people from all Quarters and is held in the Blue Quarter. Once there he visits a mysterious place called the ‘Bathysphere’, where he experiences an insight into his past that is understood through the dream-like logic of a vision that this environment induces by a kind of process of sensual immersion. This addictive place marks a turning point in Thomas’s life, as its apparent fantasies compel him to escape the system, and so his adventure around all four Quarters begins.

 Thomas’s dramatic adventure not only exposes the misery of people within the Divided Kingdom, but also symbolically evokes various periods of British history and the convergence of various political credos. This is evident in the details by which the different Quarters are represented. The portrayal of the Green Quarter, for instance, represents the immediate post-war period (Eckstein et al., 2008). In addition to the ‘old war medals’ (292), Marco Rinaldi, a representative of the Green Quarter who works as a ‘social historian’, offers a clue to the underlying periodization given that reference is made to the Welfare State and nationalization. This emphasis is hinted at with Thomas’s description of his routine: ‘One afternoon in the middle of December, I was returning from the town centre, where I had just collected my weekly allowance […]’ (260). This is significant since apart from its inclusive largesse, this phase of history was also well-known period for economic decline that led to the event of 1979 popularly known as the ‘Winter of Discontent’. Industrial decline marks out the Green Quarter, including the town, Iron Vale, a place

famous for its trains. It was here, once upon a time, that locomotive engines for the entire country had been manufactured. During the last two decades, however, the foundries and roiling mills had closed, and all that remained of the glory days was the railway station […]. (267)

This is also evoked in part through the narrator’s depiction of a group of unemployed men depending on cheap rooms in landlady Clarise Tucker’s house to sustain the seemingly communal lifestyle of a multiply occupied dwelling that Thomas shares for a while. Such a set of relationships was evident in Britain after World War Two. Tara Martin López (2014) offers details of the financial challenges that families endured and how ‘women’s contribution to the overall household income was important in post-war Britain’ (32). Thomas dismisses the gloom of fellow lodger, Aaron: ‘“You know, there’s nothing particularly special about you,” I said. “You’re just like the rest of us. We’re all the same. Not because we’re melancholic – whatever that means – but because we’re haunted by the lives we could have had. The lives we never had a chance to live”’ (266). His regret is part of a growing self-awareness, a recovery of the past, and soon afterwards he encounters the town’s Museum of Tears where, as Claris explains to another dismissive lodger, Horowicz: ‘Grief could be collected, exhibited. Grief could be *remembered*. And if we had proof that we’d been sad, she argued, then we also had proof that we’d been happy, since the one, more often than not, presupposed the other’ (272) [emphasis in original]. Thomas visits the museum and unexpectedly comes across a tiny vial of tears, a memorial to his parents’ grief:

[M]y eye happened to fall on a name I recognised. *Micklewright*. The air around me appeared to sag and then fold in on itself. I looked away from the wall and blinked two or three times, then I looked back again. The name was still there. In fact, the name was there twice: *Micklewright*, *Sally*, and then right next to it, *Micklewright*, *Philip*.

My mother and father.

A trap-door opened in me somewhere and my heart dropped through it. (274)

[emphasis in original]

For all the ideological interventions and familial reconfigurations, the effect of the recovered affiliation is profound, and subsequently, a cascade of associated memories returns, overwhelming him, after which he uses the dates on their exhibit to confirm their deaths.

The Yellow Quarter, on the other hand, has been a determinedly capitalist territory, therefore by implication a far more fundamentally Thatcherite environment. This is confirmed by the portrayal of the contrasting social classes of the choleric people. Thomas describes the environment of a ‘wide grand avenue’ (143) in its capital, Congreve, with a suggestive juxtaposition:

I couldn’t help but notice the variety of goods on offer, the sheer lavishness of the displays. At the same time, beggars sat hunched over on every corner [...]. Most of these beggars had hung cardboard squares around their necks on bits of string, and even from a distance I could read their sorry messages: STARVING or HELP ME, in one case, with bitter sarcasm, SMALL CHANGE ONLY PLEASE. (143) [emphasis in original]

This scene emphasises an asymmetrical condition between the implied consumers and the visible beggars who are juxtaposed in proximity, indicative of a set of values differentiating between human beings. This is the result of a varied set of relations of production highlighted by the products of the high-end stores. It aesthetically emphasises the exploitation of the working class whose labour-power is tied up in the displayed goods, most of the value discarded on the point of sale and the profits retained only for the very few. Thus, the system renders such workers in a state of alienation, and the beggars are those punished economically by the system.

In contrast, the Blue Quarter is not predicated on a particular historical or periodical context of Britain as are the other Quarters, but it is regarded as exotic and imbued with otherness. As the head of ‘Department of Transfer and Relocation’, Ajit Vishram, tells Thomas (before sending him to the conference held in Aquaville, the capital city of the Blue Quarter): ‘“It’s supposed to be a magical city. The canals, the Turkish baths, the water taxis... Apparently they have an indoor ocean too. You can go surfing half a mile below the surface of the earth”’ (85-86). These details indicate both layered and subterranean aspects of experience, perhaps metaphoric of the Iceberg, which can be seen as an exemplary model borrowed from Freud’s psychological dynamic of the conscious and unconscious. In this sense of underlying meaning and significations, it is unsurprising that various almost mystical rituals and religious beliefs are major characteristics of the Blue Quarter. In addition to the ‘Church of Heaven on Earth’, there are fables and mysterious elements that designate the Blue Quarter as unique and spiritual. The experiences reported by the relocation officers seem to confirm this suggestion, which Thomas discusses with his colleague, Sonya, prior to his departure and before he summarises the accounts that had circulated: ‘I heard stories about the Blue Quarter too – tales of enchantment and possession, of pagan ritual, of bizarre religious cults – but I had heard them from relocation officers, and they had always been notorious for their lurid imagination’ (87). Hence, most of the conflict that takes place in the Blue Quarter can be interpreted as conflict within the self, which is highlighted by Thomas’s awakening that occurs in the Bathysphere.

 As for the Red Quarter, as its designated traits suggest, it is relatively moderate and lies somewhere between the above-mentioned Quarters. Indeed, since Thomas’s journey starts and ends in this Quarter, one might consider it a benchmark for comparison to the other quarters. However, since Thomas is a product of this zone, the Red Quarter is not a static condition. Rather, like him, this kingdom has the potential to go through stages of political maturation, stages embedded in the figure of the narrator himself and explored in all that he encounters and reflects upon during the period spent travelling and staying in these Quarters. His journey thus evokes by implication Marx’s (1992) recommendation for the modern person to acquire knowledge through experience:

Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his needs, to maintain and reproduce his life, so must civilized man, so he must do so in all forms of society and under all possible modes of productions. This realm of natural necessity expands with his development, because his needs do too; but the productive forces to satisfy these expand at the same time. (959)

Importantly, following his baptism experience in the Bathysphere, Thomas’s identity transforms each time he passes a border. In considering this facet of the narrative, this chapter draws on perspectives developed by Arnold Van Gennep in *The Rights of Passage* (2013), including what Salon T. Kimball describes in the introduction thus: ‘His analysis of rites of incorporation is valid for understanding the problems associated with the “alienated” and the “unclaimed” of modern societies’ (x). In his analysis of semi-civilised societies, Gennep observes three types of rites of passage or life crises the individual undergoes throughout his/her life: separation, transition (or *limen*), and incorporation. In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (2017), Victor Turner explores how three such types or phases might function as a process of shifting identity, for his overarching states of being are those ‘of liminality or of liminal personae (“threshold people”) [which] are necessarily ambiguous’ (95) and others are guided by ‘the values of communities’ (112):

The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from fixed point in the social structure, from a set of conditions (a “state”), or from both. During the intervening “liminal” period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the “passenger”) are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase [reaggregation or reincorporation] the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and “structural” type […]. (94-95)

As the reader may observe, the significance of Gennep’s phases is centralised in their capacity to combine both the political and the religious. In contrast, many Marxist thinkers fail to comprehend such a correlation, diminishing the mythic and the sacral elements of variously human consciousness itself, social interaction and institutions, and the framing of cultural needs. It is precisely in this context that, intriguingly, Bourdieu (1996) warns of a limitation in the work of Max Weber in considering the latter elements:

he always remains enclosed in the Marxist logic of research into functions which (even when precisely formulated) do not teach us very much about the structure of the religious message itself. But, above all, Weber does not perceive that the universes of specialists function like relatively autonomous microcosms, structured spaces (hence spaces amenable to structural analysis, but of another type) of objective relations between positions […]. (203-204)

Initially Thomas seems to share such a deficiency, but his transformation allows him a new sense of far wider, radically more diverse coordinates of the human condition. The overarching structure and sets of beliefs that comprise life in the various divided kingdoms has equally to be perceived through their sociological and psychological dimensions. Importantly, the reader ought to consider the events through the prism of shifting social and emotional states, the changing perspective of those coerced into transitional identities after great hegemonic pressure is exerted, producing emergent alienating structures not yet fully formed.

The objective of the next section is to scrutinise the impact of the new system upon the society’s behaviour, analysing its roots by focusing on the ideological state apparatuses that emerged or are adapted and putting into perspective the complex reality of levels of violence (both implicit and explicit). This will provide a threshold for the second section that answers the following question: is this alienation an abnormal and negative phenomenon, or is it just a phase that is necessary to achieve a highest stage whereby the Western spirit reaches its full development? This highest stage is one in which society liberates itself from the imposed conditions of vulnerability. In terms of the second possibility, Sayers (2011) argues that ‘Alienation is not merely subjective discontent with work, it is an objective and historically specific condition, and a necessary phase of historical development’ (xii). As for the first, it forms the basis of many Marxists’ argument, but most prominently Althusser, who holds that the abolition of all ISAs and RSA offers the only solution for such a malaise and allow the proletariat to regain the ownership of the modes of production.

**4.3. Reconstructing the Social Formation**

The novel begins with Thomas’s narration of the initial phase of the ‘Rearrangement’, with very little information provided about the underlying reason for this coercive governmental act. The scene is divisive, having two groups of people: the guards and civilians. Acting in a radical, unexpected and implicitly revolutionary manner, the guards dominate the population so as to allow the quartering of the country without resistance. The experience remains traumatic in Thomas’s memory, painful to recollect, with its mixture of direct, yet curiously suppressed violence. It is as if Thomas normalises this catastrophe retrospectively in his narration:

**T**here were men in my room, and it was bright, too bright, and I was being lifted out of bed. I didn’t struggle or cry out; I didn’t make a sound. [...]

 They put me in the back of a lorry, along with people of every age, all of whom wore armbands, none of whom I recognised. No one spoke, or even moved. I remember no violence, only the silence and the constant, weightless rain. […]

I could see my parents. They hadn’t had time to dress properly. [...] My mother’s feet were bare.

My mother’s feet... (3)

Significantly, Thomas pretends not to know his mother. Despite his assertion that there was no violence, the description of the people’s reaction to the raid and their fate provides proof of the opposite: their recognition of the potential for violence if the process is resisted in any way. The whole population are stunned by the authorities’ night raid, submitting to the guards’ determination with silence, which is a noticeable attitude of victimhood (Govier, 2015, 1). To have armed soldiers attacking the dwellings of civilians and forcing them to leave their spouses and children is nothing but subjective violence in its purest form. Thomas, ironically, does not identify this experience as violent because he narrates from a distinct time in his future (where he reflects and informs the reader directly). The moment becomes an instant of birth, since he reluctantly asserts:

That’s how memory begins.

No, not my memory. My life. (4)

Since ‘the term “twice-born” clearly indicates the true role of rites of passage’ (105), as Gennep (2013) notes, the ‘Rearrangement’, is an event that puts an end to individual’s lives before the division, and therefore marks the time of their birth into a new order at its genesis. From this perspective, Thomas sees his life as starting after the ‘Rearrangement’ even though he was eight years old at the time. He therefore recognises (at least implicitly) his life before the division as representing a distinct, if suppressed phase, and he surprises himself with specific details from the past. He repeats them out loud (as quoted above), which gives evidence of traumatic injury marked by this governmental practice. In citing Freud, Caruth (2016) states that ‘the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but the mind’ (3) [emphasis in original], adding that it ‘is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive action of the survivor’ (4). However, Thomas’s psychological injury does not impact his ability to evaluate his own experience of the ‘Rearrangement’ in which the authorities adjust subjective violence to a more systematic version, normalising within the parameters of an outwardly peaceful atmosphere.

In this sense, the ‘Rearrangement’ is an initially violent upheaval: a governmental revolution against the previous structure deployed for the mode of production replaced with four dominant areas for differential modes of production, each with a distinct typology of being. This means introducing a new superstructure that combines all the Quarters and construct a unique base for each. Yet not all the territories adhere outwardly to an identical superstructure, for the latter is constituted of two levels. As Althusser (2014) notes, ‘the political-legal level (law and the state) and the ideological level (the various ideologies: religious, moral, legal, political, and so on)’ (53), which can differ. All the Quarters have the same political-legal overarching framework (or, level), but they differ in terms of their topographical ideology. The ‘Rearrangement’ itself as a term is figurative for the dominant political-legal level. Thus, despite all the dissimilarities between the Quarters, each celebrates the ‘Rearrangement’ anniversary and sends their representatives to a political meeting that is held in a different Quarter each year.[[25]](#footnote-26) The new legal and administrative framework that the authorities of the Divided Kingdom introduce uses repressive apparatus based upon the pseudo-science of assessing people and their individual psychological traits collectively, with echoes of coercive eugenics. Althusser (2014) notes:

Law is a formal, systematized, non-contradictory, (tendentially) comprehensive system *that cannot exist by itself.*

 On the one hand, it rests on part of the state repressive apparatus for support. On the other hand, it rests on legal ideology and a little supplement of moral ideology for support (68) [emphasis in original]

The legal ideology that underpins this system in Thomson’s novel is the claim that the test for psychological traits is based on a medical understanding rooted in two thousand years of knowledge. The authorities, then, have given this study an apparently scientific character in order to address the ostensibly problematic issues of the given society; engaging science lends credence to the radical reshaping of the community’s structure and supposedly its behavioural patterns.

In addition, the system artificially creates totems with encoded loyalties and oppositions involving symbolic use of certain creatures, which results in people identifying an allegiance in a simplistic fashion so that they become dogmatic. These are as follows: The Red Quarter, peacock; the Yellow Quarter, salamander; the Green Quarter, rabbit; the Blue Quarter, sea horse. These intentionally constructed divisions define people’s identity, as it constitutes their subjectivity. It is precisely a process of *interpellation* in the Althusserian sense. The creatures therefore set the rule for the individual to distinguish the “I” from “you”, since Althusser (2014) argues that ‘To recognize that we are subjects, however, and that we function in the ritual practices of the most daily life […] this recognition gives us only the ‘consciousness’ of our incessant (eternal) practice of ideological recognition: its consciousness, that is, *its recognition*’ (190) and second that ‘a*ll ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, through the functioning of the category of the subject’ (190) [emphases in original]. This affirms the eternal relation between ideology and interpellation. Apparently, these totems help the authorities to sustain and conceal the systemic violence that, with its smooth functioning, has disastrous consequences in the world of *Divided Kingdom* on two fundamental levels: political and economic. As indicated earlier, once the government has divided the populace according to the four psychological traits signified by these totems, a group of people become redundant by means of exclusion, but they are simultaneously included within the kingdom’s borders. The authorities categorise these *homo sacer* figures as the White People.[[26]](#footnote-27)

The description of this abject group and the way they behave is highly evocative and allows the reader to draw parallels with victimised minorities in Britain (and around the globe). Their inability to speak and the fact they have unique facial expressions suggest a passivity in relation to any form of violence. Yet, their ‘telepathic power’, which Thomas discovers in a later encounter, proves to him that they are conscious and able to communicate among themselves: ‘*They were sending pictures to each other in their heads*’ (307) [emphasis in original]. As Thomas admits to himself of these pictures: ‘they came from somewhere quite outside my experience’ (307), indicating that the White People are radically different from the way of life both in the newly constructed reality and its predecessor, much like immigrants. In this sense, their name does not denote their ethnicity, but is derived from the conspicuous irony of the novel and their white hooded clothes that represent their own code. It is ironic that whiteness in this culture is regarded as aberrant, and beneath contempt, given its elevated hierarchical status in the racial sciences that emerged in the nineteenth century, and which has persisted in the West and beyond since.

The position of socially excluded group is ambiguous, but very definitely one of otherness, which we know since the narrator describes them as lacking a sense of ownership of the past itself or aggression (298). Moreover, the actions and response of the border guards towards a group of these White People at the threshold of the Yellow Quarter is highly significant:

We stood in the centre of the room while they fanned out in front of us, each guard approaching from a slightly different direction, as though they were each preoccupied by a slightly different aspect of our appearance. This behaviour struck me as both patronising and sardonic. They were playing on the fact that interest was something we weren’t used to and didn’t deserve, and in doing so they were establishing their own superior status as a species. (300)

The White People are reduced to less than human here, Thomas confirms that the inhabitants of the four Quarters are very largely ethnically white. In this regard, one could argue that the violence the White People face is an imperialist one, but it is even worse since they are denied any residual status as human beings at all. The three characteristics of code (white cloak), race, and vulnerability lend the White People an important locus in the novel. In addition, their lack of speech imbues them with an ambiguity that masks their lives and their suffering and makes them both enigmatic and yet knowing. Such a depiction highlights the otherness that the White People experience within the Divided Kingdom, whether this difference is racially, nationally or culturally constructed, or even a matter of the non-verbal manner in which they communicate.[[27]](#footnote-28) Nevertheless, as Esterino Adami (2013) points out, once drawn to them: ‘[Thomas] decides to join the White People in their diasporic passages across geographical, but also cultural, borders, in a process that renegotiates the meaning of belonging and being’ (4), not knowing in advance what to expect.

Indeed, this is unsurprising since each quarter has a unique mode of production, and the way White People are perceived is radically different in each one. In other words, their knowability or lack of it is variable. The residents of the Blue, Green and Red Quarters recognize them as ‘mystical’ or ‘spiritual’ whereas the choleric people treat them as a ‘scapegoat’ (126). The latter is reflected in the experience of the narrator and his three White People friends (two men and a woman) at the Yellow Quarter’s check point (as quoted above), after a week of joining them in the Green Quarter. Once they approach the border, fear haunts Thomas’s consciousness, for he knows quite well the violent nature of the choleric people. Their arrival coincides with the guards’ bad fortune in the lottery, a matter which aggravates the situation. According to Thomas, ‘They [were] muttering and cursing. They had been checking the lottery results, it seemed, and none of them had won’ (300). This effectively produces an outrageous attitude emerging in the form of violence towards the newcomers as an act of substitution. The guards’ ‘superior status’ (300) is not only achieved by physical violence, but also through humiliation and sexual assault, such as forcing a man to drink urine, and penetrating a woman with a carrot. Such degradation, strictly speaking, is due to the White People’s absolute passivity to violence, which provokes the guards’ ‘anxiety’, and catalyses brutality (Žižek, 2002, 21). According to Thomas: ‘The guards began to squeeze the woman’s breasts, which made her writhe and squeal, and only encouraged them to go further’ (301). This scene emphasizes the guards’ masochistic characteristics. Thus, responding to what is effectively a scapegoat mechanism, the guards redirect violence onto the White People, who lack the ability and desire for revenge.

Such a depiction mirrors the plight of refugees; those who flee conflict zones seeking new environments that are promising and safe. Refugees are almost always subject to violence throughout their journey, whether inflicted upon them by natural causes or by human agency, such as trafficking gangs (Medina, 2014). Yet entering the targeted country does not mean the end of their strife, as many of them may face ruthless guards, as in the case above. In some cases, they are denied entry to the country in which they seek refuge. For instance, although the UK, along with other coalition countries led by the United States, contributed to the destruction of Iraq, a great number of unsuccessful Iraqi asylum seekers entered the country only to be deported back to the conflict zones (Hintjens, 2012). Those who were lucky and successfuly entered the UK were left adrift without support and not legally allowed to work. According to Helen Hintajens (2012), theirs were ‘lives lived liminally, below the radar, yet they can always come to the attention of police and immigration authorities when something goes wrong’ (91). They were scapegoats and thus ‘subject to the whims of a ‘deportation machine’ embedded within the heart of the state’ (Hintjens, 2012). Hintjens (2012) also notes that those rejected faced physical violence at the hand of Kurdish border guards as well as members of the G4S security guards before being delivered to the Iraqi government, which draws a close parallel to the case of Thomas and his marginalised friends at the border of the Yellow Quarter.[[28]](#footnote-29)

It should be noted that *Divided Kingdom*’s population are indifferent and fail to respond to any sense of crisis for those displaced. The factual reality of degrading this group is common knowledge, but acceptable precisely because such violence occurs within the ‘zero-level’ of the social condition, and is normalised (Žižek, 2009). Ordinary individuals therefore tend to fail to identify such violence as wrongdoing. One of the authorities’ efforts to normalise violence is by encouraging people to be active, which paradoxically has a numbing effect on the populace and certainly on class struggle. Žižek (2009) is right when claiming that ‘The threat today is not passivity, but pseudo-activity, the urge to “be active”, to “participate”, to mask the nothingness of what goes on’ (183). He adds that the real contemporary challenge ‘is to step back, to withdraw’, since those who own the modes of production ‘often prefer even “critical” participation, a dialogue [...] to make sure our ominous passivity is broken’ (183). This echoes the scenario given in an all-Quarters conference, strikingly reflected in an unexpected announcement by Josephine Cox (an event organizer), that proceedings will move to the Yellow Quarter to attend the Rearrangement Day’s celebration. Such a disruption tacitly clarifies the insignificant nature of the conference, affirmed by Cox’s explanation for this unexpected change offered to Thomas, who is about to deliver his paper: ‘she apologised for the seemingly impromptu and high-handed cancelling of my lecture. She had been determined to retain the element of surprise’ (139). Further, this improvised cancellation covertly undermines the content of the papers given by the Quarters’ representatives, including the Blue Quarter delegate Frank Bland, whose paper is entitled “Power and Energy”, which discusses his country’s borders ‘drawn directly and quite deliberately on the land’s innate psychic strength, using spiritual power to reinforce political will’ (137) and suggesting the danger that might be inflicted upon whoever crosses them. Once he finishes, Cox says: “What he doesn’t know is that he’s about to experience those dangers for himself – as we all are, in fact” (138), which by implication negates his proposed theory that aims to justify the randomness of the land’s division.

 One delegate to the trans-national conference, John Fernandez, works ‘as a shop steward in the Transport and General Workers’ Union’ (111), and his paper examines ‘terrorism in his native Yellow Quarter, with special reference to the supposed links between various disaffected elements and the trade unions’ (135). However, Fernandez seems well-aware of the functionality of these meetings and their underlying meaning, since he exhibits a level of cynical disinterest towards his own contribution when Thomas expresses his enthusiasm for listening. With coldness Fernandez replies with “At least someone’s interested” (135). Indeed, the engagement of such an oppositional individual might seem contradictory in an event fundamentally shaped by bourgeois State ideology, but this possibility is reflected by Althusser (2014), when he asks the following:

How can a ‘component part’ of the system of an ISA figure in the system of a bourgeois ISA, while being the realization of an ideology of proletarian class struggle?

The answer is simple. It has to do, not with the ‘logic’ of the system of the corresponding ISAs, but, rather, with the logic of a long *class struggle* that *imposed* legal recognition of the party and the proletarian class-struggle trade union as well as their inscription in the ISAs in question. (95) [emphasis in original]

In this framing, the proletariat is not simply dominated by bourgeois ideology, it is fully incorporated, forming a ‘component part’ because ‘proletarian ideology has not “conquered” the system of the political or the associative ISA. On the contrary, bourgeois State Ideology continues to dominate them’ (Althusser,2014, 96). The ideology, thus sustains its power, offering no real threat whatsoever. On the contrary, the State, through its ISAs, is in constant motion towards transforming the proletariat into a copy of itself, subtly insisting that its members act in accordance with its ideology. Fernandez confirms this in his confession to Thomas, when the latter illegally seeks refuge in his house, by saying: ‘I’m one of the few people who believe in that great pipe dream, that we should be able to live in the same country. All of us. You, me – even Rinaldi.’ […] ‘Then I see myself succumb to prejudice, and I realise how insidious it is, how easy …’ (195). This sudden silence reveals a realisation of the difference between Fernandez’s beliefs and his behaviour and is again testament to how pervasive the system is. Fernandez explores how traditional racism has been displaced by a new set of prejudices. As Zähringer (2017) concludes:

If one listens to Fernandez, the reciprocal aversion truly seems to stem from nothing but the very construction; in order to be somebody, the four quarter’s citizens need something which they are not part of. By separation and difference, it becomes possible to identify oneself as belonging to one particular quarter while scoring the other(s); prejudice is commonplace. (156)

Perhaps the most influential ISA in the Divided Kingdom is the familial apparatus, which appears to have reached its final stage of “disappearing” (Althusser, 2014, 77) subject to an imposed disintegration displacing its previous social productivity. Its negation and parody is the essence of the new power structure. Thomas’s narrative makes clear that in a challenge to ‘people’s conservatism, their fear of change’, the authorities identify a culprit other than themselves whereby ‘the family could be held responsible for society’s disintegration, and the politicians who masterminded the Rearrangement had felt compelled to acknowledge the fact’ (14). This is unsurprising given the novel’s form, as Zähringer (2017) suggests that ‘Blaming the family for weakening society’s fabric, and weakening the family in turn, is once again a typical move in dystopian fiction’ (32). This message is reinforced in Thomas’s mind via Miss Grove’s history lesson at Thorpe Hall, where students ‘acquire “know-how”’ (Althusser, 2014, 51) to adjust with the new rules of accepted behaviours. This is done prior to inserting children into new families at random. However, contradicting what the authorities claim, the newly reorganized families’ structure appears fragmented, scattered into unconnected entities. Parents leave their spouses, children, and their homes, whereas children are forced into a non-biological family, a new home, and thus an unknown environment full of challenges and risks. This arbitrary scenario corresponds to Plato’s ideal republic, where the family’s essence is eliminated for the good of the rest of the society. This is alluded to by Miss Groves in a rather nihilistic fashion. As Thomas narrates, ‘In time of crisis, she said, the good of the many always outweighed the misfortunes of a few, especially when the health of an entire nation was at stake’ (11). This familial alienation is intended to undermine the individuals participating in such radicalised structures, denying any actual affinity between the various participating individuals. Thomas and his friend Simon Bracewell discuss the rupture: ‘We had talked about the holding station, and we had talked about school, but we had never mentioned the families we had been placed with, let alone those from which we had been taken’ (58). This highlights the guilt associated with the family that is embedded in the heart of the system: the version presented as the main cause of the society’s disintegration prior to the division and its replacement.

From an existentialist point view, such familial alienation can be views through the lens of Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of Fraternity, which is the absence of any hierarchal status within a group of people, including the family. As Simon Glynn (1987) notes, ‘Fraternity is also a family relationship created and sustained by the mother’s nurturance of her son’ (23). Obviously, the Parry family lacks the maternal element within its structure, and this contributes to an unsettling feature of their relationships. This becomes more vivid when Victor’s wife, who has been moved to the Green Quarter as part of the dismemberment process, dies (although her death is not confirmed, merely sensed by him). Victor, as a consequence, isolates himself in his private room. Marie, on the other hand, separates herself further from other family members when she becomes pregnant. Yet, before the occurrence of these two distinct incidents, Thomas finds himself in a condition of familial disconnection, since Victor offers no exemplary fatherhood, neither for Thomas nor Marie. This failing seems widespread, thereby disallowing positive social exchange, and increasing alienation among the populace. Mr. Page, a manager of a dry-cleaners who happens to-lives close to Thomas’s, is the exception. This results in attention on the part of both Thomas and Bracewell: “‘He looks as if he’s smiling all the time,” Bracewell said’ (27), which makes Mr. Page notable, clearly distinguishable from the rest of this society, and thus emphasises the society’s underlying malaise. In other words, the imposed violence of the authorities generates generalized feelings of discomfort, and Mr. Page’s stoic attitude does not accord with such a dominant atmosphere.

 Indeed, the lack of solid connection between the Parrys prompts Thomas to find an alternative outside his household, particularly, with his friend Bracewell. This relationship is celebrated by them carving their names in the shape of a cross on a tree:

 Afterwards, I stood back, pleased to have found connection between our names. In demonstrating that they could be inter-wined, I had harked back to the secret ceremonies that had taken place at Thorpe Hall, the mingling of who one was with someone else, the sense of a shared destiny.

But Bracewell just frowned. ‘Like something in a cemetery,’ he said. (35)

This morbidity reflects the dead hand of their culture and its rulers, using the school as an ideological state apparatus while overturning the familial connection. It also reaffirms the impact of the division upon the children of Thorpe Hall.[[29]](#footnote-30) Such a process renders the children captives of this boarding school; a situation which echoes the central scenario in *Never Let Me Go* (2013), and indeed allows the authorities to transform these young people into conformist citizens subject to the dominant mode of production. As such they serve the authorities blindly (which somewhat evokes the Roman military institution of ephebes, where young adolescents were trained to be soldiers). Hence, Thorpe Hall occupies a significant position within the new order, even more so than the family. According to Althusser (2014), the young attend school in ‘the years when children are most “vulnerable”’ (145). He adds the following:

 No other Ideological State Apparatus, however, has a *captive* audience *of all the children of the capitalist social formation* at its beck and call (and – this is the least it can do – at no cost to them) *for as many years* as the schools do, eight hours a day, six days out or seven. (146) [emphasis in original]

With close parallels to procedures adopted in Hailsham in Ishiguro’s novel, language is used in Thorpe Hall to portray violence as normal, including the breaking of the maternal link. Upon enrolling in the school, Thomas sees his parents on Christmas Eve for the last time. He recollects: ‘I called for my mother and I felt someone take my hand, but when I looked up it was just Miss Groves. I managed not to cry until I was upstairs, in my bed’ (5). Essentially this dystopian state intervention causes Thomson (much like Crace and Ishiguro) to incorporate an understanding that space can be configured to help control people’s actions and ideas, framing their lives, and it operates much in the way that Bourdieu (1996) explains of the literary field itself, since it has often unspoken rules guided by what he describes as a ‘space of possibles, a system of different position-takings […]’ (200). This also relates to his concept of a habitus, which serves to indicate to individuals within groups what behaviour and attitudinal responses are allowable for any particular individual.[[30]](#footnote-31) Through this, orthodoxies tend to emerge, a process the reader encounters early in Thomson’s novel when a boy, Cody, mocks the teacher’s presentation, asking ‘“What about piss, Miss Groves?”’ (9). His tone seems facetious, potentially imbued with a putative disobedience and subtle resistance, thus not only challenging the implicit system within the school, but the system as a whole. Her anger is self-evident, Cody being dismissed from the room to be caned. As Thomas notes of another tearful fellow pupil seemingly unwilling to stop mourning the loss of his roots, during Miss Groves’ final lesson: ‘The desk to my immediate right stood empty. Poor Abdul Nazir had been removed from the house days before’ (13). The removal of one child and the beating of another who questioned and mocked the humours serve to mark out the boundaries of expected behaviour as effectively as the teacher’s orations: these actions are supplemental to her words. The willing use of physical pain is telling – in that it exudes a sense of aggression which is absent in some the statements made by the new order that acquire an implicit and ludicrous logic of their own.

Along with the dominant metalanguage used by the teachers, imposed familial disconnection enhances the importance of this specific institution in producing an ideological framework suited to the authorities’ ends. Indeed, such a process of initiation causes a radical change in the children’s lives as the past is cut off and discarded. This conforms to Gennep’s (2013) commentary on the initiation ceremony undertaken by some what he assumes are only semi-civilised societies, initiating a new member into a certain totemic group, noting that the process:

 lasts for a fairly long time and consists of a physical and mental weakening which is undoubtedly intended to make him lose all recollection of his childhood existence. Then follow the positive part: instruction in tribal law and gradual education as the novice witnesses totem ceremonies, recitations of myths, etc. (75)

This is the fundamental pattern found in the Divided Kingdom, reminding the reader that the apparent veneer of civilization is a presumption that masks our affinity with all other cultures. Whatever the reactions or psychological disturbance, however extreme and unsettling, the outcome is even worse than the beating of Cody. According to Thomas, ‘One boy hung himself’ and another ‘was found striking his head repeatedly against a wall’ (5). After Cody is disciplined violently, his injuries serve him almost as a talisman:

That night, in the bathroom, Cody showed us the backs of his thighs. The skin was striped with livid weals where Miss Grove’s cane had landed, but he had no regrets. Rather, he seemed to view the punishment as the price he had paid for some valuable information, which he was now in a position to pass on.

‘When she beats you she sort of grunts,’ he said, ‘just like a sow.’ (11)

One might read in this comparison an oblique authorial reference to Orwell’s *Animal Farm,* where a group of greedy pigs exploit the rest of the animals after forcing the human landowner, the neglectful Mr Jones, to depart the farm. As for the information that Cody has obtained, it is only a sneak peek into the realities of a system that echoes the corrupt new porcine order found in Orwell’s novel. Indeed, these cruel scenes of an injured person incorporate traumatic consequences for the observers and even the readers vicariously, and therefore have the capacity to worsen the psychological condition of the children for being retrospective witnesses. The level of detail of Thomas’s recollection is also highly telling of the events’ traumatic effects (Pederson, 2014). As for those who question and reject the new arrangement, the school’s officials quickly ostracise them because reason and knowledge are conceived as a threat to the new order. Nevertheless, a boy named Jones offers an example of such rationalism that is mirrored in his winning piece for the competition supervised by Miss Groves and can be deployed by the powers-that-be:

His design – a flag for the Red Quarter – made use of a magnified photograph of blood, which he’d found in a magazine. The pattern of red and white corpuscles looked industrious and poetic, and it was wonderfully clever too: all sanguine people carry their national flag inside themselves, whether they liked it or not (so would everybody else, of course, but as Jones quietly pointed out, for them it would be something to aspire to, a goal, a dream). (12)

The creative aspects of Jones’s work might aesthetically revoke the propagated falsehoods, that uniting people is practically impossible, but its symbolic value still sustains allegiance to the Red Quarter, while subtly undermining the other three. Jones’s notion is precisely the bearer of the prohibition that escapes Thomas. Instead, Thomas prefers the flags of the other quarters that contain animals, displaying a dogmatic interpretation that implicitly mirrors the syntactic hegemony of the English identity within Britain that is discussed by Will Turner, Bethan Davis and M. Milani (2011): ‘English is often conflated with British, and this slippage is neither benign nor accidental, but is part of a “syntax hegemony” […] through which a part of a polity has historically staked the claim to represent the whole’ (124). While Jones perhaps intends to deliver a subversive meaning to such hegemonic ambition on the part of the Red Quarter, Thomas aligns with the predominant ideology that nullifies the void rendered by Jones’ work. In other words, Thomas establishes a literal relation between the object and its sign (the Red Quarter’s flag), as if the title of the competition speaks about what has been presented. His interpretation is therefore a ‘positive correspondence’ (Žižek, 2008, 178). Indeed, these two distinct translations of one object spell out the gap between two sets of ideologies (two different symbolic universes), where one is accepted and the other differentiated, the latter of which is vehemently rejected. As a result of this rejection, Jones ‘felt threatened by the idea of […] being placed once again among people he didn’t know, and there came a point in our friendship when he would talk of nothing else’ (15). His obsession results in a ritual of standing ‘on one leg for hours at a time, and always in that same gloomy passageway’ (15). As with other in the novel, finally Jones is removed from Thorpe Hall to a destination unknown to the narrator. Despite missing his friend, Thomas desires not to associate himself with Jones throughout the novel, even though he had a closer acquaintance with him than the rest of the children. His turmoil is evident in his reaction when Bracewell asks him “Do you remember Jones?”:

My heart speeded up. I had never married Jones, I hadn’t even mixed my blood with his, but I had listened as he voiced his worries and I had done my best to reassure and comfort him. When he began to act strangely, I believed it was at least partly my fault. I had failed him, somehow, and that was a source of private shame to me. Then, when he was taken away, my shame redoubled, because secretly, somewhere deep down, I was relieved that our awkward friendship was over. Even now, more than three years later, I blushed at the mention of his name […]. (41)

Thomas refers to the gay marriage of Cody and Bracewell covertly in a bathroom at Thorpe Hall, demonstrating the children’s fear of being watched in this panoptic institution, which is hinted at by the way Miss Groves stares at the children. Thomas recollects: ‘I felt Miss Groves’ gaze pass over my head like a searchlight’s penetrating beam’ (10). Regarding the mixing of blood, this evokes the period when the children’s numbers at Thorpe Hall declined, rendering a general feeling of uncertainty among them. In response, some student ‘started making rash promises, secret pacts. *We'll remain in contact, no matter what. We'll seek each other out.* We’ll never forget. Some boys cut the palms of their hands, or tips of their fingers, and then mixed their blood together, swearing that they would be brothers [...]’ (14-15) [emphasis in original]. Indeed, marriage and mixing blood can be seen rites of initiation. In both acts there is also an economic aspect emphasised by the notion of exchange and compensation since Gennep (2013) notes, ‘If the family, the village, or the clan, is to lose one of its productive members, whether girl of boy, there should at least be some compensation! [...] all the numerous rites involving the “ransom” of something — especially a free passage to the new residence’ (119). Such exchanges are categorised outside the authorities’ constructed and constrained behavioural principles. This includes the morality reflected in Thomas’s understanding of Jones’s plight (Shaddox, 2013). Hence, Bracewell’s question penetrates Thomas’s inner object forcefully, producing a sense of shame and guilt for traversing the authority’s moral structure by empathising with Jones. This assortment of officially sanctioned violence, whether mental or physical, implicit or explicit, intends to purify the children of such residual emotional responses drawn from their past, and so to metamorphose ‘concrete individuals’ (purification) and subsequently be transformed into concrete subjects through the process of interpellation (initiation) (Althusser, 2014). From this, they emerge as individuals capable of being directed by the state’s hegemonic power relations.

As noted, this process of purification is also a rite of initiation, which includes presenting the children to the totem associated with their psychological trait, training them to become dogmatic and ready to reject otherness. For example, after learning that they are special from the anonymous official expert who visits Thorpe Hall, Thomas recollects the hysteric chants he repeats with the other students: ‘*Children of the Red Quarter*, we were shouting, *Children of the Red Quarter*. We still had no idea what it meant. It was the effect of flattery – instantaneous and powerful, but strangely hollow too’ (6) [emphasis in original]. On some level, such arbitrary superiority of one group over the rest of the society mirrors what Edkins (2003) terms as the “western’ conceptions of self and society’, in which he denotes the ‘western tendency to dichotomise at the same time as promoting western power relations’ (10) that isolate the other. In the novel, such a rejectionist attitude is reflected in the way children treat the White People. As Thomas tells Victor at a later event: ‘I could still recall the rhyme the boys had chanted: *You don’t belong/ You don’t fit/ You’re not a he/ You’re an it*’ (125) [emphasis in original]. And while the White people are nameless, those who are socially accepted are given names at the end of the initiation ceremony at Thorpe Hall. This also forms part of the authorities’ strategy to regulate the society and echoes the scenario in *Harvest* (2014) whereby Master Kent names the stranger woman as Mistress Beldam. Thomas, who finds himself entangled in this capitalist system, is alienated from his former self, able only later and unwillingly to retrieve his former name. He tells Marie that they are not genuinely related, recollecting his former identity: ‘“Matthew Micklewright”. The words sounded like gobbledegook. I wished I hadn’t said them’ (47). This indicates Thomas’s self-estrangement that has resulted from the new social reality in which he finds himself; a matter that is inseparable from the historic factor, since ‘The self is a historical and social creation’ (Sayers, 2011). Hence, those who graduate from Thorpe Hall, and similar institutions, are eagerly submissive and intensely loyal, and therefore ready to contribute to the new social order in the manner the authorities expect.

The process of ideologisation, as we learn from Althusser (2014), is not conducted solely by the scholastic apparatus, but by a web of institutions who work collaboratively as a unit, forming a system that serves the state ideology. Indeed, this includes private institutions such as the media, which has become, to a large degree, the main source of the common knowledge in Western society. According to Žižek (2002), ‘we, ordinary citizens, are totally dependent on authorities for information about what is going on: we see and hear nothing; all we know comes from the official media’ (37). Relying mainly on the media’s output means accepting any suggestion emanating from such sources, especially in catastrophic times, when threat and fear plague the majority. Significantly, in the world of the Divided Kingdom, the role of media is central since it supports the system on a daily basis by means of distraction. This is, in part, achieved through its focus on erotic desire evidenced in the Yellow Quarter. A TV programme with naked women wrestling is an example of a highly sexualized image from the novel, reducing women to mere objects that are subject to men’s sexual desires. In *Media Sex: What Are the Issues?* (2001), Barrie Gunter argues that ‘Continued exposure to this kind of representation of women may result in the acceptance of women in a subordinate sexual role and ultimately lead to behaviours that reflect this perception’ (112-113). In effect, it is eroticised violence. The mayor’s wife, whom Thomas is seated beside during the celebration of the Rearrangement Day in the Yellow Quarter, offers another example of such crass objectification that leads to sexual violence against women. Thomas describes her as a motionless mannequin used to display the mayor’s fortune, a trophy wife. Yet, this initial perception crumbles once he bends under the table thinking that she has dropped her napkin accidentally:

I saw that she had drawn her dress up, almost to her hips. Her unexpectedly voluptuous thighs, white as meringue, were darkened in two places by large bruises, both of which bore the imprint of somebody’s knuckles. *Look what he does to me*, she said in a harsh whisper. She gave me a look of such fury that I thought for one surreal moment that I might be the culprit. (147) [emphasis in original]

This physical damage gives an insight into the penalties of breaking the unwritten rule of phallic authority that overshadows the mayor’s wife, which explains her hesitancy in communicating with others without her husband’s permission (Kingsbury, 2008). But more importantly, what is seen under the table conflicts with everything that is visible to the other guests, undermining the staged persona of the mayor. This shows a violence that explodes from within the imaginary real whereby the surplus enjoyment of this capitalist mode of production manifests itself to Thomas. Hence, the mayor’s wife is alienated, or castrated in the Lacanian sense of the term, as according to Fink (1997):

Castration has to do with the fact that, at a certain point, we are required to give up some jouissance […]. [It] is very closely related to alienation and separation. […] in alienation the speaking being emerges and is forced to give up something as he or she comes to be in language. Separation requires a second renunciation: the pleasure derived from the Other as demand, from casting the Other’s demand as the object in fantasy […] that is, the pleasure obtained from drives. (99)

 This quotation might explain the unconscious dynamics underlying the encounter, but in no way does it justify such patriarchal violence against women. The wife’s rightful anger emanates from her subjection to control and mirrors the dynamics of this heartless new state, which itself is misogynistic. Moreever, the media’s influence is more prevalent during events that have a direct relation to the State’s ideology, or what Althusser (2014) terms ‘“big days”’ (80), as it manipulates the people’s sense of empathy so that they conform with the primary ideology. Such an attitudinal component has been noted earlier when discussing the conformist behaviour inculcated at Thorpe Hall. Althusser (2014) is right when he asserts that ‘*The ideology realized in an ISA ensures its systematic unity on the basis of an “anchoring” in material functions specific to each ISA; these functions are not reducible to that ideology, but serve it as a “support*”’ (77) [emphasis in original]. In such big events, the role of the media is to sensualize their effects; a form of a personalized distraction from the real underlying dynamics. This is evident when considering the participation of the media after the bombing that takes place in the Yellow Quarter during the Rearrangement Day’s celebration. The news channel report focuses on the tragedy subjectively in order to dramatize the terrorist attack. After escaping the incident’s location, Thomas recollects what he sees in the bar’s TV: ‘we were shown endless close-ups of the rubble, among which lay an assortment of unlikely objects – an armchair, a vacuum-cleaner, three oranges, a doll (the camera lingered on the doll, of course)’ (155). These repeated sights are crucial to sustain the chaotic atmosphere and provoke a particular judgmental response among the viewers to the immediacy of death and suffering. Such an effect is not simply a matter of coercing the public into condemning the terrorists, but rather it serves to engender resistance of and grounds to dismiss their justifications.

The representation of wars and catastrophes and their effect on public opinion has been discussed by Susan Sontag in her work *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), where she begins by citing and analysing the clash of views between Virginia Woolf and an unnamed lawyer over the necessities of war during the period of the Spanish Civil War. Given the fact that both interlocutors were from an educated class, their miscommunication was predicated on their most apparent difference, gender. In an attempt to grasp the view of the other gender, Woolf explored photographs, taken from the war in Spain, seeking what she herself might have missed. As Sontag indicates, the pictures of victims and tumbledown buildings led Woolf to conclude that their failure to understand each other was grounded on ‘imagination’ of wars and ‘empathy’ for the sufferer. Yet, in querying Woolf’s assumptions Sontag offers certain remarks that in effect provide a framework for understanding the impact of media on people: ‘the photographs might instead have reinforced their belief in the justness of that struggle’ (9). What Sontag is arguing is that pictures of such atrocities are able to introduce a new sentiment to the public, which ultimately entails a certain implicit judgment, and she also frames Woolf’s initial aloofness: ‘To read in the pictures, as Woolf does, only what confirms a general abhorrence of war is to stand back from an engagement with Spain as a country with history. It is to dismiss politics’ (9). Media portrayal then is primarily a symbolic effort to influence the public’s attitudes and judgments regarding not only catastrophes and comparable events, but also minorities or even countries.

Surely there is nothing spontaneous about a collective reaction towards a catastrophe, and there is usually a pointer from the media by which the public locates its required direction. According to Sontag, such mediation undertaken by the media is often visual in its nature: ‘The hunt for more dramatic (as they’re often described) images drives the photographic enterprise, and is part of normality of a culture in which shock has become a leading stimulus of consumption and source of value’ (23). Take the example of immigration, which is obliquely a major concern of the critique in the novel. Historically, this has been a serious challenge for Britain since the second half of the last century, with a significant increase of immigrants occuring after the Second World War which resulted in the need for a plan for a multi-ethnic Britain. Eckstein, Korte, Pirker, and Reinfandt (2008), who discuss multiculturalism in Britain after 2000 and its impact on contemporary fiction, provide a brief history of the national debate about multi-ethnic Britain. They note that the subject of multi-ethnic Britain, which began at the end of the 1960s and resurfaced in the 1990s in the light of a racial crime, the murder of Stephen Lawrence, emerged again in 2000 through the ‘Parekh Report’, which is a prediction of the future of multi-ethnic in Britain, setting out what might be achieved (Eckstein et al., 2008). The general perception of this report, for some observers, offered a measurement of the overall progression in this field (Eckstein et al., 2008). The ultimate aim of the ‘Parekh Report’ was to further integrate British society in a positive multicultural fashion, and yet that society has actually responded to certain tenets underpinning the report with two opposing views, both positive and negative. However, such oppositional views were not simultaneous responses, but came to the fore after the most monumental and therefore (in)famous event of the new century, 9/11, after which criticism of multiculturalism intensified, especially after the 7/7 bombings in London (Eckstein et al., 2008). These spectacular events effectively have changed the way people perceive such threats and dangers: they are as no longer arising from outside, but within the country’s borders, an enemy within.

In *World at Risk* (2009), Ulrich Beck argues that ‘Risk is synonymous not with catastrophe, but with the anticipation of the catastrophe’ (67), indicating one must also interrogate ‘the staging of catastrophe’ (67) [emphasis in original]. Such dramatic changes in public opinion, as indicated above, would seem to be almost impossible without the intervention of the media. Beck (2009) asks, ‘how should we decipher the ‘symbolic code’ of 9/11, the tsunami catastrophe, etc.?’ (67). This question leads us to explore the consequences of such systematic violence in the novel on a symbolic level: how this is reflected in human communication and interaction, and its effect on issues such as racism (Žižek, 2009). As Fernandez later tells Thomas:

‘I’m not interested in the colour of someone’s skin. It’s their thoughts that bother me. The new racism is psychological. What’s strange is, we seem to need it – to thrive on it. If we don’t have someone to despise, we feel uncomfortable, we feel we haven’t properly defined ourselves. Hate gives us hard edges. And the authorities knew that, of course. In fact, they were banking on it.’ (196)

Thomas’s journey to the Blue Quarter offers an indication of such antagonism among even official representatives. For instance, during an unofficial gathering at ‘THE UNDER GROUND OCEAN’, Bland surfs in the artificial ocean, injuring Rinaldi by accident. Although the mishap is not intended by Bland, when prompted by Thomas as the victim insists on Bland’s culpability:

I noticed the surgical tape on Rinaldi’s forehead. ‘You’re the one who had the accident, aren’t you?’

‘It wasn’t an accident,” Rinaldi said. ‘He did it on purpose. He was trying to kill me.’

I stared at him. ‘Really?’

The others fell about laughing, Bland included. (134)

Being from a different Quarter renders Bland as other, which plays a significant role in the dynamic of such an automatic accusation. Symbolic racism is present in another unofficial gathering, when Thomas and Fernandez observe the dirtiness of Charlie Boorman’s hotel room. Fernandez addresses Thomas: “Talk about melancholy’ [...] ‘talk about fucking gloom” (134), which by implication denotes the capitalist perspective towards the time period associated with the Green Quarter. Soon, this type of underlying dismissiveness, and therefore potential aggression and violence, escalates when the delegates begin to play cards:

The game began. They were drinking Boorman’s brandy. Old, it was. Aged in special oak casks. [...] The green rabbit rotated solemnly above the table.

‘We had a peacock too,’ de Mattos said, ‘but Rinaldi fell on it.’

‘I just fell over. Squashed it flat.’ Rinaldi looked at me. ‘Nothing personal.’ He glanced down, fingered his lapel. ‘Lost my name-badge too.’

‘Rinaldi’s name-badge,’ de Mattos said, ‘it’s not for people at the conference. It's so he knows who he is when he wakes up in the morning.’ (135)

Such confrontation is the result of stereotyping, which is part of the symbolism of the state. This characteristic is shared by the Yellow Quarter’s residents, and therefore is inherited by their children, providing evidence for the regime’s failure to solve the problems with youth before the division, and clearly confirms the growing problem of corruption. For example, when Thomas is transformed into a White person, he becomes a target of a group of young muggers. As Althusser (2014) comments, ‘The role of Repressive State Apparatus, insofar as it is a repressive apparatus, consists essentially in securing by force (physical or otherwise) the political relations of exploitation’ (247). Although the attempted robbery fails, the statement that Odell (an anonymous figure who unexpectedly appears to Thomas towards the end of his journey, arguably his Anima) offers is striking: “Those gangs of kids, they often carry knives – or guns” (353). Her declaration confirms that the problem has become more expansive, complicated and dangerous than in the past. Rather than children killing their peers, they are now targeting adults. Such relations militate toward an undermining of respect for their elders, creating an implicit intergenerational conflict. A very similar line of influence is indicated in another example taken from the Yellow Quarter which effectively charts the impact of family on children. Thomas reports what he sees:

 Then a crowd of figures looming, the winter sun behind them. Men mostly, though I saw women too. And children. Heads shaved on account of lice. Or was it the custom in these parts, to shave the head of children? They must have been told of our approach. They had weapons. (316)

The similar outward appearance of the children indicates a clear element of ideological control and is a symbolic refraction of the threatened violence, which is also indicated subsequently in a collective attempt to hunt the narrator as part of an attack on his group. Thomas narrates: ‘One of our number had been set on fire. No more than one. Deep in the woods, white birds were sprouting bright orange crests and wing-feathers’ (317). The metaphor adds to the gruesome nature of such violent and murderous responses to the White People. In the two aforementioned examples, blame might be attributed to society as a whole and to state institutions specifically (its ISAs) if the situation were to be read hegemonically.

 To curb the state’s violence and to facilitate the transition to socialism, Althusser (2014) argues that ‘It is not enough to destroy the repressive apparatus; it is also necessary to destroy and replace the Ideological State Apparatuses’ (54). Otherwise, this would bring about more violence and tighten the authorities’ grip, but the post-Rearrangment abjection seems to have inverted this set of relations. Take the example of the protest held in one of the outskirts of the Yellow Quarter, near ‘THE AXE EDGE INN’ (161) as its sign proclaims, with its metaphor of violence and beheading, where Thomas seeks to stay. We can add to this a song whose lyrics reveal an oppositional stance to the promoted ideology: ‘We had to be allowed to live together, to complement one another. That was where true freedom lay’ (166). The protest incorporates resistance to the constituting core of the system through the burning of animals that represent the four Quarters.[[31]](#footnote-32) This radical counteraction is not only thwarted by the authorities through the use of its RSA (supported by ISAs, since the media does not cover this social event), but also spreads violence among the protesters, who target each other. This is evident when Thomas escapes the raided zone along with three young protesters, two men and a woman. Yet, eventually, he finds himself in a deserted place, after being attacked and robbed. According to him, ‘Clearly, though there was a kind of protocol involved. They couldn’t leave until their superiority had been properly established’ (174). This highlights the contagious feature of violence, one type sustaining another within a paradoxical hierarchy.

 So far, the exploration of the concept of alienation has only covered socio-political aspects, but one might also trace its effect on the individual self and its relation to nature in a world where self-estrangement is an inseparable feature in the capitalist order of things. For Georg Hegel, the individual in the modern liberal state has been able to reunite with the natural and social world (Sayers, 2011). This idealist view drives many Marxists and Existentialists to criticise Hegel. They argue that capitalism widens the gap between the self and itself due to the division of labour, which refers to both ‘the division of productive activities […], and […] the social division of labour or occupational specialisation’ (Sayers, 2011, 133). The only way to overcome alienation is by prevailing over the bourgeois system. But this does not mean the impossibility of retaining the self and authenticity in such conditions. Rather, it is attainable, as the following section will explore in detail.

**4.4. Towards the Final Stage**

A year after being allocated a family (and agreeing to work as spy for the authorities prior to that), Thomas ‘was summoned to the Ministry of Health and Social Security’ (29). To his surprise, he finds Miss Groves working with the ministry, revealing that her job at Thorpe Hall was ‘temporarily, the same as [his]’ (30). The purpose of the meeting itself is camouflaged from Thomas’s family: to ensure his social contribution as a spy is beneficial. Such disguised meetings continue throughout the time Thomas spends with his family:

There had been other interviews, of course – like visits to the dentist, they occurred at regular intervals and filled me with a sense of trepidation – and I had stuck to my theme, embroidering a little when I thought it appropriate – how grateful I was to have been placed with such a wonderfully sanguine family, how lucky I had been, and so on – but I had never mentioned the content of these interviews to Victor, nor he asked. (32)

This key episode offers a clear indication as to the nature of the division of labour.[[32]](#footnote-33) Both, Thomas and Miss Groves, are forced to complete different and complicated tasks that contribute to the authorities’ ultimate aim of extracting surplus value more efficiently. Neither time nor type of work is chosen freely, but is part of the process of social engineering. This is emphasised by the changing of the narrator’s name just before leaving Thorpe Hal, Mr Reek tells Thomas that “From now on […] your name will be Thomas Parry […] a good solid name. you could do anything with a name like that. Anything at all” (17). Mr Reek, directly afterward, assigns Thomas his social duty: eavesdropping on his psychological twin family.

Since the outcome and purpose of spying is to provide information to the authorities, the collected data is already owned by someone other than the informer who has lost his/her labour (the effort of producing the requested material) in the process of producing the covert information. Doing so automatically generates two types of alienation. First, alienation from the product of labour, deriving from the outcome of the authorities’ power over Thomas, meaning that he relinquishes his control over his actions. Perhaps this is much clearer when Thomas works with the relocation team as an ‘observer’ (65); he has no power over the process in which he participates directly. Secondly, alienation from the activity of labour, which denotes the disconnection between Thomas and his freedom; what he is doing and what he actually desires as the result of responsibility. This effectively traps him in an intricate complex of myriad social relations that have been indicated above, where he tries to satisfy the need of both parties.

Such responsibility and its divisionary force on the narrator’s self is also evident when he receives the offer from the Ministry of Health and Social Security to work with the transference team; a job that has a negative historical impact on Thomas’s non-biological family, specifically Victor. Diana Bilal, who introduces this proposal, predicts such an issue and comforts Thomas by saying that they will “arrange a phantom job […] A front. Something they can be proud of” (60). She also notes that, as compensation, his family would be immune from being transferred to other quarters. She continues explaining that “They would be exempted from all future testing. They would be granted the right to remain [in the Red Quarter] permanently” (60). Underlying her words is an economic exchange, highlighting the family’s transformation from being a supposedly productive unit to a mere ransom by which Thomas can be made obedient and accept self-abandonment. He later confesses:

It was up to people like me, I thought, to safeguard the values and integrity of the Red Quarter. Only later did I start to understand why I had been pushing myself so hard. I *had* to fight for the system, I *had* to believe in it, or my removal from my family would all have been for nothing’ (75) [emphasis in original].

This conforms to Sayers' (2011) description of social relations in a capitalist mode of production: ‘Social relations are thus not established directly between people, but indirectly via relation between things, or rather between the economic value bestowed on things within the economic system’ (59), adding that they ‘operate in an alien way, independently of us’ (60). Therefore, the balance between producing material products and the reproduction of social relations is broken, imposing on the individual a sense of unmeaningful agency.

Thomas’s career then has a direct influence on the nature of his social relations, a fact which sheds light on the concept of alienation from others. The time he spends with his non-biological family is relatively short, but here one should pay attention to the social totality. While Victor keeps himself busy in his office, Marie spends most of her time outside their house (mostly with men) and after aborting her infant works at a local shop. For this reason, Thomas enjoys much of his time accompanying his friend Bracewell. However, once Thomas joins the relocation team, a new social network gradually abolishes the old one, and his specialisation constitutes a barrier to most types of social interaction outside the linear progression of his career. Thomas admits: ‘I had almost no social life. I went out with a girl called Alex, who was a violinist, but she ended it after three months, claiming that we hardly saw each other’ (75). Hence, Thomas’s mode of production shapes his social relations (and influences subjectivities), which aligns with Marx’s position that “In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations” (Sayers, 2011, 43). This is evident through its antithesis. Once Thomas escapes the system, his old social relations resurface. His wish to call Marie at the outskirts of the Yellow Quarter reflects such emergent desire, imagining her bedside photograph of her on a yacht in a pink bikini, which is clearly a libidinous image indicating his erotic desire:

As I approached the turning I saw a phone-box, and I had the sudden urge to call someone, so I could set a seal on what I’d done, so I didn’t feel quite alone. I stepped inside and put the receiver to my ear. The line was dead. I stared out across the road, the tops of trees in sunlight, their trunks still plunged in shade. Who I would I have talked to anyway? Marie? (160)

Marie’s emergence from the natural tableau surrounding Thomas suggests that he reaches a sense of self universality and autonomy. He detaches himself from any social relations and makes direct contact with his inner self through meditation. His essence thereby harmonises with the world, producing a moment of self-realisation indicated by his achievement in finding a meaning to his existence. This is affirmed through his imaginary conversation with Marie, where he stresses their mutual dreams and thus an implicit expression of supressed desire.

*I always loved you, right from the beginning.* Another pause, my mind drifting back. *I hated those people for making you feel bad.*

*I’ll probably think I dreamt all this. I often have dreams about you, Tom.*

*I dream about you too.* (160) [emphasis in original]

Such a sensuous undercurrent existed in Thomas’s life before escaping the system, but in an alienated fashion. For example, Thomas expresses his attraction to Marie when she asks: ‘“What kinds of girl do you like, Tom?”’. Thomas responds

I lowered my voice to a whisper. ‘Like you’.

She didn’t seem to hear what I was telling her – or, if she did, she automatically discounted it. (47)[[33]](#footnote-34)

Although Marie is not Thomas’s biological sister, she conforms to the legal ideology that contradicts the moral one. She accepts the governmental tests as truthful or at least a given fact – in that it acquires a socially framed credibility, (re-)shaping their lives through its exploitation of their naiveté and unspoken complicity. The system conveys hegemonic facts that are so powerful that they compel every individual to follow the system’s fundamentally divisive rules, whereby any hesitation must be held privately, as indicated in Thomas’s attitude. The conversation above illustrates that both Thomas’s and Marie’s sense of the world are products of a process carried by the system, meaning the pair either ignore the possibility of expressing the intrinsic value of each to the other, or fear doing so as transgressive. Later after taking a supermarket job, she ignores him, making Thomas feel ‘Everything about our lives was askew, off kilter. We were all adrift in that small house, with no notion of how to steer a curse’ (50).

This is projected more vividly in another instance, at the end of the recruitment meeting with Diana Bilal, when Thomas asks her a chance “to think it over?”. He reports her reaction as follows: ‘When Diana faced me again, the spokes in her eyes seems to be revolving, as though some machinery inside her head had just been set in motion’ (61). This illustrates a lack of spirit. Surely then the inside is a mere reflection of the environment outside: the capitalist state (Boxall, 2013). Thus, this instance affirms the capacity of the capitalist mode of production to reform or alter the individual’s senses beyond the limits of both humanity and animality (mainly achieved via ISAs). Indeed, work in the given society is presented as an alienated fact of life, rather than being a liberating activity. When in the Green Quarter, Thomas records seeing figures in a graveyard who exist outside such realities:

One January night, standing in the middle of the bridge and looking down into the churchyard, I saw three scraps of white in the darkness. […] [I]n that same moment I remembered someone telling me that White People were often to be found in cemeteries. Various theories had been forward, the most obvious being that they instinctively identified with dead people. After all, one could argue that White People were dead too. Dead in the eyes of the authorities, at least. Bureaucratically dead. […] I wasn’t sure why I was so curious, or what it was I hoped to learn. I felt compelled, though – guided even. (269)[[34]](#footnote-35)

This passage is metaphorically rich with details denoting the status of the White People as *homo sacer*. Thomas’s location and the way he regards these figures spell out the gap between two totally different social groups; a member of one is fully human and a member of the other is dehumanized. And yet, finally, it is this group that allows Thomas to complete a transition that he had begun earlier. This is despite the predominance of a coercive social structure, because of which self-estrangement seems permanent and self-achievement unattainable. However, his experience in the Bathysphere indicates the opposite. At this point, Thomas starts a journey towards some sort of authenticity and autonomy. It represents a ‘magic portal’ with a similar effect to that found in the ‘Roman arch of triumph’, where ‘The victor was first required to separate himself from the enemy world through a series of rites, in order to be able to return to the Roman world by passing the arch’ (Gennep, 2013). The act of crossing was meant to purify the warrior from any residual impurity has been caused by the enemy. The same purpose can be found in Christian baptism, designated to cleanse an individual of the original sin, and from which the Bathysphere seems to receive its name. On one level, the Bathysphere evokes the Hegelian interpretation of religions, whereby he concludes that ‘only Christianity fully recognizes the inward nature of the human being’ (Stewart, 2019), which essentially opposes the Roman slavery tradition that underpins the novel. Thomas goes to this mysterious place twice, where he passes the curtain that conceals his inner self, and this also evokes Hegel’s (GWF, 2018) words when describing negativity:

The curtain is therefore lifted away from the inner, and what is present is the gazing of the inner into the inner, the gazing of the *non-distinguished* “like pole,” which repels itself from itself, positing itself as a *distinguished* inner, but *for which* there is present just as immediately the *non-difference* of both of them, *self-consciousness*. (101) [emphasis in original]

In a similar fashion, Thomas negates his constructed self to allow his underlying unconscious self to emerge. During his first visit, he sees Jones and his sister Marie, who both arguably stand for Thomas’s guilt and suppressed desire. On the second visit, he finds himself in his pre-arrangement house hearing his mother summoning him using his previous name, ‘Matthew’.[[35]](#footnote-36) Thomas thus loses the constructed attributes in the first episode while regaining his former identity in the second. Further, the experience itself helps Thomas to reconnect the broken link between his self and his need, since when interrogated by the taxi driver of his intention of visiting this place, Thomas’s first thought is: ‘You’re phlegmatic, I thought. What would you know? We were different people, the taxi driver and I. We had different needs’ (127-28). Hence, the two visits allow Thomas to connect with his concrete individuality, triggering a moment of reconciliation with the point of origin. Reporting the effect of the Bathysphere, Thomas tells Fernandez:

I told him how I seemed to have crossed a kind of border in myself, and how, for the first time, I’d had a real sense of the person I used to be, the person I was first, before everything changed, and as I was talking I realised something extraordinary I had always seen the moment when I was lifted out of bed as a birth, but actually the opposite was true. The cold hands, the bright lights – my parents grieving … I had died that night, and I’d been dead ever since. And now I was trying to do something about that. What was this whole journey in the end but an attempt to bring myself back to life? (192).

Hence, the Bathysphere reunites Thomas with the consciousness of reason, since he realises his essence and orientation toward a more harmonious state of being. According to Hegel (2018), ‘the essence *existing-in-and-for-itself*, which as consciousness is at the same time actual and which represents itself to itself, is spirit’ (253). Thomas therefore has overcome his sense of alienation, since his self-conscious spirit evolves after passing over various sociohistorical forms, reaching a point where his self recognises itself – a moment of enlightenment.

This idealist view is presented in the novel as a step towards a fully developed selfhood (not as a final stage). The novel also affirms the Marxian ideas of alienation through the unexpected change of the conference plan. It forces Thomas to leave the very place, the Blue Quarter, that reunites him with his true self suppressed and is denied by the capitalist state, the Yellow Quarter. Alienation in this quarter seems to be of another kind, corrigible, contestable and is finally a relation which he eventually transcends after visiting the Green Quarter which (symbolically) showcases two important elements: housing and work, the latter being the main factor through which we differentiate between what is human and what is animal. Thomas’ admission into the ranks of the White People is perhaps best read as a representation of a further historical stage of the development of the relationship between man and nature in which the former finds himself outside the various states of alienation and thus liberated.

His trip to the Blue Quarter, during which he visits the Bathysphere, a mysterious place, is in turn a journey of self-discovery through the process of perception that corresponds to a Hegelian viewpoint (rather than a Marxist one), albeit both thinkers agree that there is an intrinsic motive that pushes a person to transcend alienation, requiring two aspects: the cognitive and historical. For Marx though, capitalism (epitomised in the novel by the Yellow Quarter) represents the great historical dilemma of the modern age because it accelerates and magnifies alienation.

One might concur with Zähringer (2017) observation that ‘The governmentally imposed rhetoric itself is a machine which subverts proper collaboration. The Divided Kingdom is a state of contestation’ (165). This tension mirrors that outlined by Althusser (2014) where ‘ideology is nothing, being pure dream, (fabricated by none can say what power - unless it is the alienation of the division of labour, but that, too, is a negative determination) […]’ (175). [[36]](#footnote-37) Perhaps to most appropriately contextualise Thomson’s novel’s underlying dynamics we have to return to the satiric grounding of the narrative as the primary structural element and relate all the myriad events to the real world we inhabit when thinking of the borders produced by the Rearrangement. This has impelled Adami (2013) to conclude that ‘It is a highly intertextual device, which draws from sci-fi and dystopian literature but which also emphatically evokes the partitioning power of borders and boundaries in real-life contexts of the past or of the present (e.g. Berlin, Nicosia, Ireland)’ (8). The novel demonstrates a link between borders themselves and larger states of alienation. Such a condition as we have seen multiply above is manifested at the level of the individual too, permeating every aspect of the individual lives, dominating them either with subtle or not so subtle means.

In conclusion, this chapter has explored alienation as depicted in Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom*. The first section has provided a concise overview of Marx’s alienation theory and highlighted its connection to satire. Next, the authority’s desire and ambition to control the population ideologically was discussed. The discussion then moved to the impact of the new social formation on the individual’s disposition by referring to Althusser’s ideological state apparatuses, which include family, media, and school. The final section endeavoured to answer whether, with such economic and social power that prevails over the population of the divided kingdom, the reappropriation of the essence is possible by drawing on both Marx and Hegel’s perception of alienation. Although the protagonist gradually finds himself unable to settle into this new social formation, he gains the authorities’ trust. He soon officially represents his quarter in a political meeting, where an opportunity to escape the system arises and which results in an all-quarters journey. This adventure furthers Thomas’s understanding of the new order and gains him a sense of authenticity. However, towards the end of the novel, he unexpectedly finds Vishram in his flat, offering details of his odyssey. As their conversation develops, they consider the implications of the laws set by the authorities, with Vishram asserting that breaking the law is ‘sometimes […] the only way’ (Thomson, 2005, 382) to discover the infrastructure of the system. He justifies his astonishingly subversive suggestion by saying, ‘You’ve been to many places. You’ve met the people who live there. You’ve learned about their difficulties, their dissatisfactions, and that knowledge is invaluable’ (Thomson, 2005, 382). Here, Vishram’s account does not only offer details of Thomas’s illegal border crossing, but it contains a confession made by a high-level governmental figure that the authorities are aware of Thomas’s actions throughout his journey. This means that, in effect, he has almost quasi-official approval, and so he realises he is useful to them. The emphasis on the value of the information that the journey has enabled Thomas to collect for the officials means that individuals within the territories are always under surveillance, and any attempt to escape will not undermine its power; but rather, it will strengthen the system. Since Thomas is neither included nor excluded by the system, one might argue that he is a *homo sacer*. However, Vishram’s confession implies that Thomas is a scapegoat – a sacrifice to reinforce the authorities. At any rate, both interpretations consolidate the view that Thomas is an extremely vulnerable subject and prone to various types of violence. He is thus a fittingly complex figure with which to finish my discussion.

**Conclusion**

This thesis has considered and discussed in detail various kinds of victimhood featured in selected dystopian and apocalyptic postmillennial British fiction, by specifically reflecting on violence and oppression as manifested in the three representative novels. To do so, has necessitated an exploration of key features of the novels considered, deploying numerous theories and concepts that outline the precise characteristics and significance of these aesthetic strategies. In order clearly to situate and better comprehend victimhood a key element has been the concept of trauma and associated theories related to this growing field of study (with reference to Alexander, Caruth, Edkins, Leys and Pederson among others). Equally significant have been critical analyses that incorporated a range of key concepts such as scapegoating and the sacrificial (Girard), the taboo (Freud), Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser), Repressive State Apparatus and alienation (Marx), the monstrous (Flahault), violence (Žižek), imitation and simulacra (Baudrillard), myth (Cassirer), *mis en abyme* (Dällenbach), punishment (Foucault), and bare/political existence, *zoē*, *bios*, exclusion/ inclusion (Agamben). My aim has been to deploy such ideas and sources in a way that both enriches and strengthens the reading and the overall critique. Although I have made comparison to real world contexts (which are often part of the very dynamics that inspire writers and on which they may draw), I have maintained several underlying distinctions described by Lubomír Doležel in *Heterocosmica* (1998): first ‘[I]t is quite evident that fictional persons cannot meet, interact, or communicate with real people’ (16); and yet, second ‘Fiction thrives on the contingency of worlds, emphatically asserted by the idea of possible worlds’ (222). Clearly, the latter is a key element of all three novels featured in this thesis, which all are predicated on paradigmatic (*Harvest*) or alternate (*Never Let Me Go, Divided Kingdom*) features. Doležel continues to suggest that a narrative ‘refers not only to its fictional world but also, in various ways and degrees, to its source, the protoworld’ (222) and, as Ernestine Lahey (2019) suggests, this in part of a constructive set of references whereby ‘readers learn from their engagement with fiction, taking on new information from fictional texts even when it clashes with their pre-existing knowledge’ (54) and can contribute to ‘the establishment of more permanent knowledge structures’ (57). These aspects have been amply and variously illustrated, I would suggest, by my analyses of the three selected novels. It is worth noting, as illustrated in previous chapters, that each of these works of fiction has a certain intensity and intimacy derived from being first person reflective narratives charged with an implied confessional urge, and yet this perspective is mediated by a range of other voices and points of view found in the narrative’s eventful episodic structures. That said, all three novels are predicated on what Doležel describes as ‘a subjective mode that adopts the fictional persona’s discourse for world construction’ (152), hence characterisation and the type of voice adopted have been critical in the analysis. In all three novels, momentous events radically alter the lives of the protagonists (and other characters), through a series of circumstances and encounters that are revealed as each story progresses. Each narrative is retrospective, with a revelatory structure that reveals the dynamics of a set of crises as they have unfolded.

The introduction explored the ubiquity of post-millennial apocalyptic and dystopian British fiction. It suggested that the proliferation of these two closely related genres is due to political factors, such as 9/11, London bombing, Covid-19 and other similar events. With reference to Kunkel (2008) and Cristofaro (2019), it observed the change in the paradigm of these two genres to a bleaker depiction than the traditional one. This shift has been attributed to the crisis of meaning that dismantled what was previously thought of as a utopian future. In the following section, it explored the etymological meaning of and the working definition for victimhood and trauma. Finally, it offered a review of the works of Girard and Agamben, whose work has been explored thoroughly in the second and third chapters.

Chapter Two focused on Crace’s *Harvest,* offering a close textual analysis of events related to three victims of scapegoating and it does so by examining the social culpability of a group of villagers who conspire wordlessly (as if by instinct or long socialisation together) to reposition guilt onto the new arrivals to escape blame for a recent local disaster themselves. They exploit the newcomers’ sudden arrival and their lack of knowledge about the locality. A religious perspective, whereby the duality of friend/enemy surfaces in various key scenes, is highlighted by drawing upon the work of Girard (2005), who claims that modern science fails to fully grasp the power of religiosity in the social order, for as he notes:

Religious thought encompasses a large body of phenomena under the heading of ritual impurity- phenomena that seem disparate and absurd from the viewpoint of modern science but whose relationship and reality become perfectly clear when tested for the presence of basic violence, the prime ingredient and ultimate resource of the whole system. (34)

This misunderstanding is grounded on the ambivalent nature of the sacred, which is the subject of inquiry for many scholars. Even Agamben (1995), who rejects the sacrificial, nevertheless repeatedly asks, ‘in what, then, does the sacredness of the sacred man consist?’ (72). For Rey Chow (2006) this question is redundant, noting that the sacredness of *homo sacer* is not linked to God, but to the sovereign body, which is omnipotent over whomever lies or exists within its territories (Crace captures this imposition with the travellers becoming immediately subject to the authority of Master Kent once within his insignificant, tiny domain). The killing of *homo sacer* is not sacrificial from the sovereign power’s point of view; however, it is sacrificial from the perspective of those who have bare life (134). Chow offers a salient practical example to explain this:

To the Roman officials in occupied Judea, for instance, the execution of a political dissenter such as Jesus, too, probably meant little more than the routine extermination of “lice”, but for the followers of Christianity, that execution (together with its horrendous instrument, the cross) has carried a definitive symbolic significance of sacrifice over centuries. (134)

 In this sense, the sacred is limited to those who are under threat of its violence. Every religion or political power has the ability to exercise its omnipotence over its people by producing its own notion of the sacred. And in order to control the public more firmly, religion and political power create frontiers to prevent people from going beyond; in other words, to control them ideologically. These frontiers are based on one psychological factor – fear. Towards the novel’s end Crace’s narrator Walter is terrified by Mistress Beldam (once ironically an object of his desire) who is wreaking havoc on the manor house while her husband cuts apart the pillory where the father died. Walter reflects, ‘All neighbourly and more-than-neighbourly feeling I’ve ever had for her are gone. She frightens me. She only frightens me. That woman carries blade and fire’ (265). The novel incorporates the realities of fear: by the end of the novel both the villagers and narrator have fled en masse, a literal exodus, but a disordered and traumatic one. On the boundary Walter hesitates and reflects, ‘One step beyond, however, and everything you have is left behind. You are disowned’ (270), which may be seen as the ultimate trauma. Yet, amid the confusion and fear, there is a certain promise: ‘If anything, the views ahead, beyond our bounds, are more rewarding to the eye. They are more savage, certainly. And more formless and more void’ (272). Despite these utterances expressing an inchoate quality, and with the bleakness of the recent events, Crace has Walter grasp an unlikely and enigmatic optimism by concluding that ‘The lane is telling me I should not fear the future that it holds […] I have to carry on alone until I reach wherever is waiting me, until I gain wherever is awaiting us’ (273).

As explained in the Chapter Three on Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, the narrative details an awful underlying truth of organ harvesting from clones bred for that purpose. This is a fundamentally human tragedy—for this is what readers encounter despite the myopia of that alternate world. The reality of this situation is gradually revealed by one of their number, Kathy H., as the narrative progresses. As previously noted, she is very matter-of-fact about this process, because it has been normalised within her sphere of action and thought. However, she is clearly traumatised in a way that affects her narrative, which is full of gaps and random details, in itself mirroring the symptomology of someone suffering from a deep trauma. Added to this feature is a curious paradox found in the naivete and simultaneous knowingness exhibited, which soon becomes characteristic of the narrator and of her approach to life. All of this is both a product of the institution in which she has grown up, Hailsham, where what the clones are taught diverges from reality, and in this they are led and supposedly educated by the guardians. As Kathy H. reflects concerning sex:

Looking back now, I can see we were pretty confused about this whole area around sex. That’s hardly surprising, I suppose, given we were barely sixteen. But what added to the confusion—I can see it more clearly now—was the fact that the guardians were themselves confused. […] In other words, for all the talk of sex being beautiful, we had the distinct impression we’d be in trouble if the guardians caught us at it. (93)

Part of the traumatising awfulness of the scenario outlined here is an implicit reality that sex can never for the clones be reproductive, only ever recreational and then only during the phase between leaving Hailsham and their ultimate deaths from organ harvesting. As with so much else, they are here denied the fullness of human experience. By the end of the novel, Kathy’s only consolation (which is a limited one) is her recollection of her friends: ‘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’ (280). Yet ironically, she reflects upon her fate euphemistically: ‘Once I’m able to have a quieter life, in whichever centre they send me to, I’ll have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that’ll be something no one can take away’ (281). This seems ironic since as we saw earlier it is this very institution that has inculcated in her so many negative beliefs. Her apparent composure is unsettling, but again symptomatic of a deep trauma. Ishiguro’s reader is drawn as if they were complicit into this system of exploitative deflection that results in the clones’ compliance. Facing a littered and seemingly chaotic rural landscape at the end, Kathy H. seems not to have developed in the course of her self-reflection, being still submissive and passive, which seems so very disturbing given what she has revealed. Unlike Crace, who ends with a moment of optimism even after the violence and death Walter has encountered, in Ishiguro’s novel there is little hope of action at the conclusion of this confessional story.

 Crace’s fictional world might be regarded as a synthetic past structured to convey certain underlying truths about the accumulation of power and capital via appropriation, explored using concepts gleaned from a Marxist critique. Ishiguro, however, offers a dystopian near future with key technological differences. Rather than push forward with nuclear energy and power, science in Ishiguro’s alternate reality has focused on bio-genetics. In contrast, in Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom*, the writer creates an alternate reality where the outmoded medical science of the four humours – which has a limited rational basis – has been revived and used to create an ideological rearrangement of the whole social order of the United Kingdom even at the micro-level of the family unit. In this narrative, as explored in the fourth chapter, the key traumatic symptoms are intense feelings of alienation, apprehended implicitly and explicitly, and consciously and unconsciously by the protagonist and others. This first-person narrative lacks the intensity of the other two books considered in this thesis. This is because the protagonist, Thomas Parry (the reassigned name he accepts with little or at least no discernible protest), seems to suffer from a dissociation of sorts, resulting in part from his eagerness to be compliant. This was evident even from his childhood despite being forcibly taken away from his family. He is told by his newly assigned sister that there were tanks in the Yellow Quarter after rioting the previous night and a curfew has been imposed:

‘What’s a curfew?’ I asked eventually.

In truth, I wasn’t all that curious. I was just trying to fit in. The events that had upset Victor [his newly assigned father] seemed academic to me, remote, even foreign. Perhaps I lacked the proper context – after all, I had spent five months in the middle of nowhere, shielded from the worst of what was going on – or perhaps it was the eerie matter-of-factness of a child who, having experienced a trauma of his own, decides simply to get on with the business of living, which in my case meant acquainting myself with my new environment. And there was so much to get used to, so much to explore. (24)

These dynamics shape Thomas and much of what he observes (since he is above all else a disengaged observer), yet the narrative is underpinned by an intense, but only implicit trauma that emerges very gradually until his epiphany when he sees the names of his birth parents. Throughout the novel, Thomas remains in a state of profound shock, another subdued symptom of a far more widespread sense of victimhood.

The intention of this thesis has been to provide clear analysis that leads to the conclusion that reading fiction is a highly valuable pursuit for understanding the contemporary world. As Lahey (2019) suggests, it can impel ‘readers to build a text-world that inevitably feeds back into their discourse-world in the form of new or modified knowledge’ (54). This process can then influence attitudinal structures in the real world. In all three novels considered here, the very tone and mode of voice mirrors the traumatic conditions that underpin the lives of all characters, sometimes obviously marked and at other times more subtly so. In conclusion, all three novels create circumstances that allow us to question our realities and the nature of the various kinds of victimhood that perhaps continue to bedevil contemporary culture, and which are thematically, tonally and symbolically conveyed in divergent and diverse ways in this trio of correlated works of fiction. Indeed, they typify a dominant strand of the postmillennial aesthetic zeitgeist, animating the intriguing sets of encounters and disasters that feature in the overlapping matrices of each of these texts. Finally, they affirm that colonialism underpins contemporary victimhood, and the collective sense of victimhood is a growing phenomenon in Britain on both levels: culturally and politically.

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1. Examples of such novels: Will Self’s *The Book of Dave* (2006), Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) and Ian McEwan’s *The Children Act* (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Perhaps one of the most notable fictional works that corresponds to Christie’s example of today’s ideal victims is Trezza Azzopardi’s *Remember Me* (2004), in which the author presents a quasi-biography of a homeless old women, a victim of a family saga, who strives for reconstruct her memory from childhood to present (as the title suggests). The protagonist narrates: ‘I’m not a disobedient child: I say my prayers, I try to remember things, I try to be useful’ (29). Azzopardi’s narrator is highly unreliable, yet our empathy is elicited by her naivete, and her transgressions are only revealed once the octogenarian is abject and in a state of precarity, living on the streets and seemingly plagued by visions of ghosts. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Bildungsroman is first-person narration, whereby the protagonist narrates from childhood to maturation. It is also important to note that this subgenre is ‘closely tied to human rights narrative’ (Levy, 2011, 1), and is featured in both *Never Let Me Go* and *Divided Kingdom*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. It worth noting here Ian McEwan’s post-9/11 novel, *Saturday* (2005), which has been received positively by many critics. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Baudrillard (1998) adds: ‘– worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra. […] It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real […]’ (2). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. *Harvest* might be considered an apocalyptic novel. However, Crace’s version of enclosure can also be seen as a dystopic view of the sixteenth century social appropriation of the means of the production of food; the removal of what had been a fundamental and widespread right. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Crace has discussed his socialist leanings in terms of how they inform his writing in an interview with Nicholas Wroe (2013) , who reports of Crace that ‘At grammar school he was politically active – CND, Keep Left’ (N.P.), and that as ‘A lifelong socialist and activist, he has long expressed regret his novels aren’t more directly political.’ (N.P.) A specific inspiration for the map that appears at the beginning of the novel was his seeing, at Tate Britain ‘an early 18th-century watercolour showing an aerial view of an enclosure’. Moreover, the introduction to the novel published by the AQA exam board identifies the text’s ‘Marxist perspective’ (Hodgson, 2012). As Jennifer Hodgson (2012) reported after interviewing the author: ‘He is one of an increasingly lesser-spotted breed of Old Lefty; weaned on the (old) Labour Party, on trade unionism and social justice by his political activist, autodidact father. “I sound like a terrible Marxist, a Stalinist”’, Crace says (4). This is made clear by John Armstrong (2018) and not in any abstract sense, when he says the village faces ‘the greater forces of history at work beyond its boundaries, making the novel both *timeless* and connected to present issues of global development’ (68). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. In an interview with Thomson (2006), the author declared that *Divided Kingdom* is neither dystopian nor has it been influenced by other novels such as George Orwell’s *1980* (n.p). Yet readers who are familiar with Orwell’s novel can find some common, albeit differently weighted, features between the two narratives. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Such a depiction brings to the fore what Stanley Cohen (Cohen, 2011) describes as ‘folk devils’, which are systemically labelled groups whose actions and appearance are magnified by the media as inconsistent with the rest of the society, and thus they produce a sense of ‘moral panic’ when observed (vi). Cohen (2011) envisages that ‘More moral panics will be generated and other, as yet nameless, folk devils will be created’ (223), a phenomenon which is rooted in ‘our society as presently structured’ (233). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* (2005)indicates an affinity even at this earlier stage with potential human victimhood in the sacrificial, ‘“From the animal realm were chosen as victims those who were, if we might use the phrase, the most *human* in nature”’ (qtd. 3) [emphasis in original]. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Trauma has become a more prominent theme in contemporary literature and scholarship, more generally the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Center. This point has been emphasised by many scholars, such as Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman through their work *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (2009). They highlight the vast number of American people, whether survivors, witnesses or those who were exposed to the traumatic incident through their television screens, diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD (2). Trauma was also experienced in France after the chemical incident in Toulouse that took place ten days after the New York attacks (130). A chemical factory exploded, and a shadow of fear permeated the French city’s atmosphere and its people’s consciousness, with the public quickly and understandably connecting the incident with the 9/11 terrorist attack (128). A couple of hours later, news was carried that ‘the explosion had in fact destroyed the AZF chemical factory in the south of the city’ and indicated there was no terrorists had been involved in the attack (128). However, rumours spread that the city was under the threat of toxicity, which was eventually denied by the authorities later the same day (128). This confusion caused the public to live in intense collective agitation, a situation which caused the mayor to demand psychiatric support for his city’s residents who were suffering from PTSD (130). Clearly, victimhood in such circumstances is predicated upon fear, collective threat, and most importantly on psychological harm that is intimately related with 9/11. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Intriguingly for Edkins (2003), during the First World War, the working classes were reduced in number. They ‘went like sheep to the slaughter [which] would be an archetypal victim. […]’ and memorials to bravery and honour ‘covers up the role of sovereign power in sending them to their deaths. As “bare life”, with no political say in the war, they could not have been sacrificed, only killed’ (102). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Marx (1992) adds that this resulted in ‘thefts outrages and popular misery that accompanied the forcible expropriation of people […]’ (889). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Intriguingly, Marx (1992) details a very similar process during the Highland Clearances in Scotland through an exemplary case which involves the intervention of the Duchess of Sutherland assisted by British soldiers, who ‘turn[ed] the whole county of Sutherland, the population of which had already been reduced to 15,000 by similar processes, into a sheep-walk’ (891). ‘By 1825 the 15,000 Gaels had already been replaced by 131,000 sheep’ (892). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Berlet and Lyons (2021) add that ‘scapegoating often targets socially disempowered or marginalised groups’ (N. Pag). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Bourdieu (1996) maps out human activities as fields which generates shifting grounds of action and viewpoints that are permissible as a ‘space of possibles’, explaining:

The relationship among positions and position-takings is by no means a relationship of mechanical determination. Between one and the other, in some fashion, the space of possibles interposes itself, that is to say, the space of position-takings actually realized, as it appears when it is perceived through the categories of perception constative of certain habitus, that is, as an oriented space, pregnant with position-takings […]. (234-235)

In *Harvest*, both the space of possibles and the overarching habitus are in rapid transition, adding a vertiginous dimension to Walter and the villagers. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Such a linguistic sacrifice is very common. Take the example of cancer. According to Govier (2015): ‘cancer was an unspeakable disease. If one mentioned it at all, it was alluded to cautiously and euphemistically as “the big C”” (4). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Notably, the uncanny is a significant feature in Crace’s post-millennial novels, which Tew (2016) observes in his work *Jim Crace,* explored in details in his analysis of the author’s sixth novel, *Six* (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. The case of the Beldam woman is similar to the protagonist in *Divided Kingdom*. In each quarter, he acquires a new name, which marks a different identity as a product of each quarter’s power.  [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. This feature of the novel reanimates an early modern set of beliefs that survived from a more primitive cultural system, and which still feature in certain aspects of contemporary culture, which are described by Mary Douglas (1984):

The spiritual powers which human action can unleash can roughly be divided into two classes – internal and external. The first reside within the psyche of the agent – such as evil eye, witchcraft, gifts of vision or prophecy. The second are external symbols on which the agent must consciously work: spells, blessing, curses, charms and formulas and invocations. (99) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Such a polarizing and simplistic division risks what Enns (2012) describes as potentially ‘bestowing on victims a dangerous moral authority that keeps us imprisoned in the binary logic of victim versus perpetrator, friend versus enemy’ (181), which in *Harvest* results in a climax of escalating vengeful violence. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Received positively by scholars, the novel was also shortlisted for the 2005 Booker Prize, the 2006 Arthur C. Clarke Award and for the 2005 National Book Critics Circle Award. *Time* magazine named it the best novel of 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. In ministering to others and simultaneously telling her own story interwoven with theirs own, for McDonald (2007) Kathy achieves a certain authenticity of a kind. According to him:

In telling her story, Kathy H is also involved in a life writing project that will preserve the memory of dead and dying loved ones. By incorporating them into her own memoir, which includes their decline and death whilst simultaneously twining their experiences around her own, a symbolic binding takes place in which the pathography acts as an elegiac act of witness and testimony. (80) [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. One might also draw attention to implicit comparisons between the new kingdoms in Thomson and the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s which led to civil wars, so-called ethnic cleansing, conflict with a NATO coalition and a geo-political remapping of a large part of the Balkans. There is also an echo in the Rearrangement of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent that led to its division into India and Pakistan in 1947, during which period, as Tew and Glyn White (2022) record, ‘up to two million died and twenty million were displaced in the intercommunal strife and violence initiated by partition’ (1).

 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Surely such a fictional multi-layered political topography is not far from the existing reality of the United Kingdom, drawing upon a factual reality for a devolved Britain, with Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England within the framework of overarching governance. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Agamben (1995) describes the exertion of power thus: ‘Western politics first constitutes itself through an exclusion (which is simultaneously an inclusion) of bare life’, the latter being the condition of the White People, who are excluded and marginalised, and who are subject to the naked power implicit in all other relationships but which in theirs is rendered explicit. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Such an otherness brings to fore the case of Kurdish people and their struggle with the four countries of Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. Shahrzad Mojab notes that this stateless nation, during the process of integration, suffered from: ‘genocide, ethnocide, and linguicide’ (Giles & Hyndman, 2004, 110). Every country perceives them differently; in Iran, for instance, religious figures obliged Kurdish females to wear ‘hijab’; in Iraq, after the Gulf war, the Kurds were targeted by Saddam’s regime, especially in the assigned ‘safe haven’ district (108). The fact that Kurds are perceived as an othered minority in each of these four countries makes them vulnerable in the gaze of the majority. This turns the conflict from being outside the borders to within, which highlights the transformation of conflicts in the present-day. According to Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (Giles & Hyndman, 2004), ‘most contemporary wars occur within the borders of sovereign states, not between countries as they once did’ (5). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Such events are part for the course of an ongoing situation, and the new Nationality and Borders Bill (2021) may well make circumstances far worse with its suggestion that asylum seekers should be kept offshore. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. This reflects Gennep’s (2013) words, when he says: ‘among the semicivilised peoples such acts are enveloped in ceremonies, since to the semicivilized mind no act is entirely free of the sacred. In such societies every change in a person’s life involves actions and reactions between the sacred and profane- actions and reactions to be regulated and guarded so that society as a whole will suffer no discomfort or injury’ (3). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. See also footnote fourteen for more on these two concepts. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. The animals here have a totemic projection, as every individual is fanatic of the animal that represents his quarter. This is because each animal symbolises the citizens social religion; they ‘bear a certain resemblance to the object they replace’ (Girard, 2005). Therefore, selecting animals that represent each Quarter for the ritual sacrifice is in fact a protest against the totemic division enacted by the authorities as well as its underlying totemic exogamy. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. This scenario has been observed in Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005), where the clones are forced to follow specific trajectories, in relation to work, throughout their lives. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. This example of forced choice illustrates the logic underpinning the world of *Divided Kingdom*, which finds its parallel in a segment extracted from one of the films analysed by Žižek (2002):

In a classic line from a Hollywood screwball comedy, the girl asks her boyfriend: ‘Do you want to marry me?’ ‘No!’ ‘Stop dodging the issue! Give me a straight answer!’ In a way, the underlying logic is correct: the only acceptable straight answer for the girl is ‘Yes!’, so anything else, including a straight ‘No!’ counts as evasion. This underlying logic, of course, is again that of the forced choice: you're free to decide, on condition that you make the right choice. (3) [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. One is reminded of Ishiguro’s three clone friends who meet at a graveyard during their stay at the cottages, a moment that not only marks their friendship separation, but also their sense of alienation from their own social circle. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Thomas describes his experience ‘as if [he] had blinked and missed half the evening’ (118). Hence, one might argue that Thomas’s adventure in the ‘Bathysphere’ is like the experience of a dream, an insight into his ego. Dietrich, Dietmar, Georg Fodor, Gerhard Zucker, and Dietmar Bruckner (2010), quoting Freud?:

The ego strives after pleasure and seeks to avoid un-pleasure. An increase in un-pleasure that is expected and foreseen is met by a signal of anxiety, the occasion of such an increase, whether it threatens from without or within, is known as a danger. From time to time, the ego gives up its connection with the external world and withdraws into the state of sleep, in which it makes far-reaching changes in its organization (55). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Althusser (2014) equates Marx’s idea to that of a Hegelian conception, explaining ‘This *conception* is that of alienation, which finds expression in the dialectic of correspondence and non-correspondence (or ‘contradiction’, ‘antagonism’) between *Form* and *Content*’ (212) (emphasis in original) antagonistic relations played out throughout Thomson’s narrative. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)