

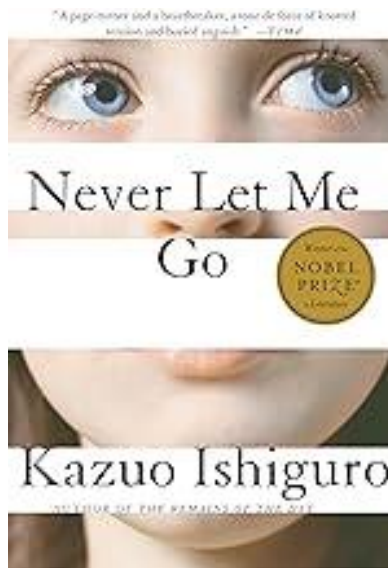
Exploring Humanity, Identity and Ethics in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

Pradeek. D., M.A., M.Phil.

Assistant Professor, Department of English
Nehru Arts and Science College (NASC)
Nehru Gardens, Thirumalayampalayam, Coimbatore
Tamil Nadu - 641 105
nascpradeek@nehrucolleges.com

Rufina Roslin Mary. S., M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed., PGDCA.

Assistant Professor, Department of English
Nehru Arts and Science College (NASC)
Nehru Gardens, Thirumalayampalayam, Coimbatore
Tamil Nadu- 641 105
nascrufina@nehrucolleges.com



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Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is a critically acclaimed novel that delves into dystopian themes of cloning, identity and the ethical dilemmas of scientific advancement. In an alternative reality where humans are cloned to provide organs for others, the novel delves into profound questions about what it means to be human, how identity is constructed and the moral

implications of using human beings as tools for medical progress. This paper will analyze the central themes of the novel: emotional and psychological development of characters, the role of memory in the formation of identity and the ethical questions raised by Ishiguro. The analysis of several key scenes and characters sustains the argument that *Never Let Me Go* is a powerful commentary on the commodification of life and the limits of scientific innovation.

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, cloning, identity, ethics, dystopia, memory, scientific advancement

Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro is a contemporary British writer of Japanese origin, distinguished by his subtle yet profoundly philosophic works that question humanity's very fabric. In 2005, he made *Never Let Me Go*, with a dystopian world filled with cloned humans, solely cloned for organ harvesting. The story revolves around three clones Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, who are raised in an English boarding school called Hailsham, only to later find out the grim future that awaits them. The novel raises questions about the ethical implications of cloning and how these practices affect individual identity and human relationships.

This paper explores the central themes of identity, memory and ethics in *Never Let Me Go*. Through the emotional journeys of the characters, Ishiguro portrays the complexity of human nature and the outcomes of scientific progress that has crossed the boundaries between being human and objectification. The novel, therefore, quietly but devastatingly invites readers to consider moral responsibilities related to medical technology and how these could redefine human life. The paper will further elaborate on the role of memory and how characters' relationships are influenced by their partial knowledge about their destiny.

Review of Literature

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* has inspired a broad range of critical discussions in ethics, identity, and dystopian themes. The review synthesizes insights from major works that analyze the complex narrative and thematic dimensions of the novel.

In his article, "Commodifying the Clone: Ethics, Identity, and Dystopia in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" (2014), Ian Buchanan looks at commodification as a process that occurs

under the dystopian gaze of cloning. Here, he considers the ethical connotations that arise when the clones become biological resources, raising the question of how the critique of capitalist structures is articulated through the narrative. Through his analysis, Buchanan makes it clear that Ishiguro's subtlety conveys the loss of individuality and humanity within the profit-oriented dystopia as a sharp critique of current bioethics.

The edited volume *Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of the Novels* by Sebastian Groes and Barry Lewis (2011) gives a comprehensive view of the oeuvre of Ishiguro, offering fresh insights into *Never Let Me Go*. The book puts the novel in the perspective of wider literary and philosophical frames, discussing memory, human dignity and identity constructed.

Romesh Gunsekera's article, "Kazuo Ishiguro: A Dystopian Vision in *Never Let Me Go*" (2010), explores the novel as a subtle dystopia, contrasting its understated tone with the traditional tropes of the genre. Gunsekera emphasizes the central focus of Ishiguro: the emotional lives of the clones, how their hunger for love and recognition would humanize their plight and shake readers out of their notions of personhood and autonomy. His works underscore the ethical dilemmas that arise when scientific advancement outpaces moral reflection.

Ralph J. Poole's "Memory and the Ethics of Forgetting in *Never Let Me Go*" (2014) explores the novel's treatment of memory and its role in the formation of identity. Poole argues that Ishiguro constructs memory as a double-edged sword: a source of connection and self-understanding but also a mechanism for suppressing inconvenient truths. The analysis centers around how Kathy's narrative embodies tension between remembering and forgetting to reveal the emotional cost of repression in a dystopian reality.

Together, these works create a coherent critical framework for the multi-dimensional aspects of *Never Let Me Go*. They underline Ishiguro's capacity to weave subtle but profound explorations of human life, ethics and the consequences of technological and societal advances.

The Theme of Identity

In *Never Let Me Go*, identity forms a central theme explored through the lives of Kathy, Tommy and Ruth. Being clones, the characters' sense of self is influenced by knowing that they were made to only serve the purpose of organ donation. In this, Ishiguro tries to probe the

question of what makes a person human: biological origin, emotional capabilities, or the relations they forge?

Kathy is the protagonist and narrator of the novel. She spends much of the story reflecting on her past relationships with Tommy and Ruth. Her narrative style, which often moves between memory and present experience, mirrors the instability of her identity. Unlike individuals in a traditional society, Kathy and her friends are deprived of the privilege of being able to fashion their lives. Instead, their identities were fixed for them by their makers as they are simply artifacts manufactured for medical use, this raises tension in the book because, although Kathy and her fellow inmates express fully human emotions, such as love, jealousy and friendship, they are denied rights over themselves.

This also speaks of the role that institutions like Hailsham play in forming one's identity. The boarding school plays a shelter and cage to these students. It presents a pretension of normal life in giving them lessons, making them mix with each other socially and encouraging their artistic capabilities. Simultaneously, however, it conceals the true position of the students about what they are destined to, delaying the moment when truth strikes, hence controlling their concept of identity. Through Hailsham, Ishiguro critiques the ways in which institutions can control and shape human identity for external purposes.

Memory and the Construction of Humanity

Memory plays a very important role in *Never Let Me Go*, as it is through their memories that the characters reconstruct their sense of self. Kathy's memories, in particular, provide insight into how the clones experience life, love and loss, even though they are kept ignorant of their fate for most of their upbringing. Through memory, they preserve their humanity in a world that assigns them a utilitarian function.

Perhaps one of the most poignant aspects of the novel is how characters hold on to their memories as a means of affirming their humanity in a system that refuses them autonomy. Take Kathy, for example, whose memories of Hailsham are filled with moments of friendship and fleeting romantic connections, though these are always shrouded by the shadow of their future organ donations. The use of art and creativity at Hailsham, in particular the focus on how the

students should produce artwork that might show their souls, symbolizes the desperation of the characters to leave a mark on the world that sees them only as resources.

Memory, though unreliable in *Never Let Me Go*, however is also depicted as weak. Kathy's reminiscences are highly fragmented; the recollection of Ruth and Tommy often reveals gaps and distortions in understanding a shared past of theirs. In using this very narrative technique, Ishiguro underlines the fragility of memory and how that can be molded by what institutions it operates in. The novel thus suggests that memory, though it is an important part of identity and humanity, can also be used to manipulate the individual into accepting reality as presented by the strong.

Ethics and Scientific Progress

Perhaps most compelling, however, is *Never Let Me Go* in its critique of the ethics surrounding scientific advancement, specifically in the realms of cloning and organ transplantation. Ishiguro does not present his dystopian world in stark, violent tones, a hallmark of many dystopian narratives. Instead, the novel's ethical horrors are subtle and embedded in the apparently normal lives of the clones and the cold acceptance of their fate by society at large. The novel's calm surface reflects a disturbing moral indifference to the commodification of human lives.

The moral dilemma of *Never Let Me Go* lies in the issue of whether scientific progress should allow for the exploitation of those produced only for the benefit of others. In the novel, the characters have no choice; their future is already mapped out according to the system, which values the organs of the characters above their lives. This brings up some very intricate questions regarding ethics, such as if a society that accepts these practices can still consider itself humane? What moral duties do creators have to those that they create, even if they are not considered full humans by the standards of the society?

Ishiguro explores these questions through the portrayal of both the clones and the guardians who run Hailsham. The guardians, though they sometimes show sympathy to the students, abide by the system that is using those individuals for the purpose of medical use. Miss Emily, one of the guardians, defends Hailsham as an attempt to provide the clones with some

semblance of dignity, but her argument brings out the cold utilitarianism which underpins the whole operation.

Language Style of Kazuo Ishiguro

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* has a very restrained and subtle narration style that reflects the quiet emotional depth of its protagonist, Kathy. As she reminisces over her past. This style is conversational but intimate, with a sort of deliberate simplicity that reveals an authenticity and nostalgia. This style enables the disturbing revelations of the novel, such as the cloning of the characters for organ donation, to emerge subtly, often indirectly or in fragmented disclosures. Ishiguro uses a reflective tone that emphasizes Kathy's attempt to make sense of her experiences and her relationships with Tommy and Ruth. It's a lack of obvious sentimentality or melodrama that amplifies the poignancy of the story because it's possible for the reader to pay attention to the ethical and existential implications lying just beneath the surface of these characters' lives. With such a measured style, Ishiguro crafts a hauntingly thought-provoking narrative that lingers long after the final page.

Conclusion

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* poignantly narrates an intersection of humanity, identity, and ethics that takes its toll in a world in which the scientific progress is exploited, but in no way has a hold on its moral ramifications. With the lives of Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, it unfolds the risks of turning human life into a commercial product, reducing individuals to the mere sum of their parts. In these dramatic instances, the characters' journeys in emotions, shaped through memories and controlled by various institutions, reflect the delicate state of identity in front of a system that believes in utility, rather than autonomy.

In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro subtly critiques the failures of society to meet its ethical obligations, encouraging readers to think about the consequences of uncontrolled scientific advancement. The author achieves this by setting his dystopia on a base of emotional realism rather than explicit violence; instead, he points to the quiet horrors of dehumanization and the moral blind spots that can result from a drive for progress. The novel is still a powerful reminder

of the need for ethical reflection in the face of technological and medical innovations that have the potential to redefine what it means to be human.

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