

# Transcending the Adage of Science Fiction in Never Let Me Go: A Critical Insight

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## ABSTRACT

Never Let Me Go is a beautiful work of literary fiction. Many critics and readers have classified it as a science fiction in the first reading, but that is not completely true. The novel is much more beyond this affirmation. The truth is this novel cannot be constricted under a particular genre. On the surface it may read like science fiction, but that is nearly the last piece of the puzzle which Ishiguro has used as a literary device. Kazuo Ishiguro's simplicity of theme of the novel is that of a small child, bubbling with undefined hopes, laughter and touching tears. Addressing the novel as a science fiction might take away the beauty of the awareness of ages and the wisdom of creativity. This is thus the challenging point of science-fiction assumption which this paper intends to explore. Moreover, this paper aims to break and transcend the adage of science fiction in Never Let Me Go.

## Keywords

cloning, genetic engineering, Kazuo Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go, science-fiction

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## Introduction

Never Let Me Go is a touching statement of human drama full of pathos resonating with human predicament. The novel is set in England in the 1990s. At the outset, the novel introduces Kathy. H, who is a thirty-one years old protagonist and the narrator. As the novel unfolds, she reminisces the more important points of her life since her boarding school at Hailsham with her two other friends, Ruth and Tommy.

Students of Hailsham, being kids, are unaware of the fact that they are only clones being saved for medical purposes. They only realise that they are uncommon. They need to be in good physical condition, cigarettes are not good for them and being creative is one of the most important things. Guardians are not only their instructors, but also care givers to the kids.

It is through one of the guardians Miss Lucy that the students learn about their futures being fixed and their only fate being future donors of their vital organs to others. This reflects in the below mentioned quote: as no one out of you have been visited America, either will become the film star as well or got a job in any supermarket as you had planned earlier, but you will become young than older and you would have been started to donate his/her organ. That's what each of you was created to do. (Ishiguro, 2010, p.80).

The immaturity and innocence of the students makes it difficult for them to perceive this fact. In a few days Miss Lucy is not found in Hailsham anymore, she either leaves or is taken out.

The initial time when Kathy, Ruth and Tommy are moved outside of Hailsham, they are sixteen years of age. They are taken to a location named "The Cottages" where they are expected to wait until they reach a specific age when they can become a carer. It is there that they hear the rumours about deferrals which says that if two students of Hailsham can validate their love for each other then they secure three extra years. Although it allures the students, but they get rid of the idea thinking it as a gossip. Years later, while nearing

the completion of Ruth's second donation, Kathy becomes her carer. Ruth being conscious of the little time she has left asks for pardon of Kathy for separating Tommy from her. She also confesses that she believes Kathy and Tommy could be perfect partners and will definitely be worthy of deferral. She gave Kathy the address to Madame's house, and tells them to talk to her. Then after a few days, Ruth 'completes', that is, she 'dies'. Tommy and Kathy come together just as Ruth had wished for and go to Madame's house for the deferral. Surprisingly, their old Hailsham headmistress, Miss Emily, is there as well. Both of them have conversation with Miss Emily and Madame and get to know about the truth regarding Hailsham. Further Miss Emily informs them that Hailsham is a venture to bring a reformation in the treatment of clones in England, and it has been now closed down owing to low funding. She also reveals them the truth about the deferrals which is just a rumor among the students. In reality, nothing as such existed. They also reveal them about the condition of other clones in the world. Though people take pleasure in their extraordinary lifespan because of the donated organs, they are ignorant about the continuation of clones. This is the reason, a number of clones live in a terrible condition since they are babies until the day when they 'complete'. But Hailsham is different. It shields the students from the cruel world, and provides the clones with a normal childhood by not telling them about their future. On the completion of his fourth donation, Tommy passes away and Kathy continues to live on with her life. At the denouement of the novel, we see Kathy, remorse over the memory of Tommy and Ruth, nostalgia of Hailsham, which is going to haunt her throughout her life. It will never fade away.

## Assumption

Science fiction is otherwise known as the literature of ideas and it deals with the imaginative concepts like space light, time travel, and extraterrestrial life. Referring to the novel, Never Let Me Go, which many writers, readers and critics

speculate as a sci-fi novel because of the element of cloning, the present paper identifies that each and every page is filled with awareness, human history and civilization, rather than just being a science fiction. The present paper highlights the fact that by addressing Ishiguro and the novel as a science fiction, it is to take away the beauty of the awareness of ages and the wisdom of creativity. This, in fact, is the challenging point of science fiction assumption which the present research tries to explore.

Science and technology tries to make human life better, but at the same time, there are certain fallouts, like the wilful indulgence of human beings. Under the hallmark of civilization, development and other milestones of history, there was a darker evolution which came to light, but sporadically.

### Backdrop

The history of mankind in its evolution of betterment has also concealed a very nasty, subhuman sordid history which is only protohistoric. Nobody ever happened to write that part of the history because of the historical reasons. The historians take heed to describe with the fear that they might be persecuted or criticised. But there are documents, though difficult to find as some of it had been concealed or deleted, but how much is visible that is just the tip of the ice-berg. Here, Ishiguro's talent and beauty lies in creating a very effervescent, a very subtle, sub-luminous framework which serves as the environment of the plot. If he would have put it explicitly, then we must have had a painful reading of the novel. Those untold stories better remain untold because the world will be more traumatised by the revelation of what has happened.

However, Kazuo Ishiguro is never known as a author of classical fiction, rather almost all of his works unfolds against the backdrop of Second World War especially the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki which is found in his other novels *An Artist of the Floating World* and *A Pale View Of Hills*. Similarly, *Never Let Me Go* constitutes a cardinal question on the contemporary methods of organ procurement. The debate on cloning came with the innovation of first cloned mammal, Dolly, the sheep, in 1997. After Dolly, various non-human mammals have also been cloned, but since this process or the method is unrefined, it frequently fails and as a result, the cloned organism dies soon after the process. So, cloning is a part of scientific experiment. It raises a very profound ethical concern because it directly affects human life.

Cloning or organ harvesting or organ procurement is all part of scientific experiments. But Ishiguro uses it as an extremely powerful and potent metaphor for treating human beings substitutes for each other in the name of scientific progress. Although the novel, *Never Let Me Go* is a work of fiction, yet it has a practical importance, as it points to the fact that someone's organ can save another's life. The excessive need of organs and the recent events like the Nectre Scandal in Kwazulu-Natal, where the kidneys of the indigent people were grafted into Israeli patients suggests that the events which are mentioned in the novel are likely to be believed.

It is always a mystery to where do the true subject of Ishiguro's novel lies. The situation in his novels, especially

the emotional ones is narrated in such a precise manner, also some of the boring and monotonous detail in a comical manner, and at the same time the focus is totally on the protagonist's struggle to find a kind of happiness, solace, satisfaction, and clarity in an unwilling world.

The backdrop in which the novel has been set is the genetic engineering and other technologies. In the name of genetic cloning, the drastic transplant of organs in the name of religion or development was carried out under the blanket of a sanctified ideology, which gains covers up the nasty, evil and sordid face of humans.

### Human Rights Narrative

Apart from being a sci-fi, it appears that the novel's genre is somewhat closely tied to that of human rights narrative genre. Human Rights narrative is confined in values that ratify the essential worth, equality and dignity of all human beings. *Never Let me Go* meticulously studies the way in which barbarity, cruelty, inhumanity, violation, crime, scandals, all these have become very normalized and been carried out under the table in daily life. The aspect of human rights narrative in the novel against the offsetting forces of apathy and denial have made atrocity very awful and at the same time an accepted aspect of day to day existence.

There is a unique admixture of so many narrative styles and genres used by Ishiguro has used in order to address some of the modern social issues. It also includes the concern of human rights. *Never Let Me Go* does not fit into one genre. The narrative of Kathy is basically a Bildungsroman. From her experiences of growing up in that boarding school, Hailsham, and her personal relationship with her friends Ruth and Tommy, we get to witness her personal development, as such she is seen struggling with vagueness, her loss and also her errands as a "carer" or a nurse who looks after the clone and helps them to recover from their donation procedure.

The Bildungsroman shows how an individual's desire, freedom and needs getting reconciled with their discernible responsibilities to the society. So this raises a very important question as, to what extent does an individual aspirations should meet the duties and responsibilities demanded by the society. So this narrative aspect and content of Bildungsroman has some striking similarities with that of the human privileges narrative.

In the book, *Human Rights, Inc.*, Slaughter has shown that how the two genre, the Bildungsroman and that of the human rights, are so different and at the same time there is a clear connection of language that so often overlap with each other in conditions of their description styles and conception of the relationship of the individual with that of the state. As Slaughter says:

So Slaughter meant that in the plot and environment of Bildungsroman and human privileges, the protagonist is standing as a representation for all other individuals who are struggling for their place within that larger social structure. Both the genres' have such conditions that leads to a full and free development of an individual's personality. Each genre has shown the state as an ideal world which gives the individuals their right and freedom to meet their own needs and desires, but paradoxically the same state later on

restrains those individuals by forcing them to give up their own needs and desires in order to meet the demands of the so called ideal society.

The voice of Kathy represents the voice of the entire clone community. Eventually Kathy also has to sacrifice her needs and desires to fulfil the needs of the society like other clones who 'complete' or sacrifice their life through the brutal process of organ harvesting or donation to save the life of other human beings. For whom are those clones made, that has also not been mentioned, and it is only seen that they are just donating and 'completing'. There is this imperialistic dominance which is never spelt out, but one can sense it clearly. Here, Ishiguro has not touched upon the controversial aspects of socio-political life in the world, rather has created a very beautiful saga. In the novel, human beings are the clones who are helpless and also powerless. They be acquainted with that soon they have been also going to 'complete' or die but they cannot escape that. They rather live it anyway. Now to see them like this is too disturbing.

Ishiguro with his matured imagination has created a world where cloning or the brutal organ harvesting has become an accepted practice, a world which is governed by the people who have power, wealth and do not come into the picture. Ishiguro has touched upon those controversies and debates on the violation of human dignity in a subtle way.

Clones have been groomed for harvesting for other humans. The cloning of Dolly, which is merely a scientific experiment have been superimposed on human beings. There have been numerous debates and arguments on this. Ishiguro did not go to all these debates. He simply created a world of clones, who will be groomed. The longevity of their lives is determined by the people who will be receiving their organs. He has not even discussed this imperialistic hegemony. But the saga which he has created, it has become distinct and touching. Symbolically his worldview or the cosmos that he has created in the novel is what stands apart. This aspect touches us, somewhere it tells that we are becoming clones, if not physically then spiritually, emotionally and culturally. In the name of development, we all are becoming clones and we have no choice at all.

Now the vital question that arises from the novel is why don't the clones escape? Well, to this, Ishiguro has answered that he is not involved in look at a story of valiant slaves who are rebelling and finally escape. Rather he is looking for a symbol for how these characters face humanity and that they can't really get away from it. So, he doesn't want to look at a story about escape. He wants to look at how those characters accept their fate.

Kazuo Ishiguro has fabricated a state where these characters are young but their life-spans are meant to last only for about thirty years. Thus, in a confined concertina they all undergo the entire quandary. Those who are considered as 'shadows', go through youth, adulthood and old age, but this happens in a way, in which everyone is squashed into thirty-years and ostensibly continue to live young like other humans. It is like what are the elements that become so worthwhile or important when this realisation hits us that time is too finite.

Many critics and reviewers have raised this obvious question, and with confusion and varied assumptions they have landed in various justifications. According to

Slaughter, the narratives of Bildungsroman and human rights tends to repress those rebellious impulses for the society's betterment:

"Human privileges and the contemporary Bildungsroman contribute to this basic plot arrangement that manage the pressures of both human rebellion and state legitimating human privileges law aspires to domesticate the impulse of the innovative plot of insurgence into the less-spectacular, detention centre plot of human personality expansion as the progressive organization of the personality and the state"(Slaughter 2007:90-91).

## Conclusion

The novel, with all the characters as clones, filled with organ donation centres and failed romance, it also explores an intricate portrayal of the issues of the rights of humans. Kathy's story is bit autobiographical and the other part claim rights, that aims to communicate the stories of injustice and exploitation of such people who are finding it hard to survive on the edges of allegedly socialist societies.

Kazuo Ishiguro is spiritually matured and emotionally touching. His drama of life in his novels unfolds under the crossroads of human history and that of the loss of humanism which is the starting point of Ishiguro's novel.

Science fiction works are meant to entertain as they stretch the imagination on the probabilities of existent sci-fi investigation. But in *Never Let Me Go*, we are not going into the space and beyond. Rather we are coming down to earth; we are rooted where we see those characters. We are not seeing the aliens. So, there it gets diverted from the sci-fi genre. The twist and turn of events and the evolution of the characters are the strength of the novel.

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