Research Paper

Memory, Identity and Resistance: Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go as Critical Dystopia

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Abstract

This paper examines Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go (2005) as a critical dystopia, situating it within the broader framework of science fiction and dystopian literature. Drawing on the theoretical insights of Lyman Tower Sargent and others, the study explores how Ishiguro critiques socio-political structures while retaining an undercurrent of hope, a hallmark of critical dystopias. The novel intertwines themes of identity, autonomy, and the commodification of human life with bioethical dilemmas stemming from advancements in genetic engineering and cloning. Central to the analysis is the concept of defamiliarisation, a technique rooted in Russian Formalism and integral to dystopian narratives, as noted by Booker. By rendering the familiar world of boarding schools and intimate relationships strange, Ishiguro provokes readers to critically reflect on the moral implications of cloning and organ donation. The seemingly idyllic Hailsham and its institutionalised deception highlight the dehumanisation and systemic oppression embedded within the narrative. Furthermore, the study reveals how Never Let Me Go transcends conventional dystopian frameworks through its detailed exploration of memory, nostalgia, and personal connections. These elements serve as coping mechanisms for characters, illustrating their quiet resistance against an inhumane system. By blending despair with faint glimmers of hope, Ishiguro's narrative invites readers to question the ethical dimensions of scientific progress and the fragility of humanity. Ultimately, this paper positions Never Let Me Go as a profound example of critical dystopian literature, challenging societal norms and enriching the discourse on contemporary ethical and existential issues.

مقاله پژوهشی

حافظه، هویت و مقاومت: تحلیل گفتمان پاد آرمانشهری رمان هرگز رهایم مکن اثر کازو ایشیگورو

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چکیده

این مقاله به بررسی رمان هرگز رهایم مکن اثر کازوئو ایشی‌گورو به‌عنوان یک پادآرمانشهر انتقادی می‌پردازد. با تکیه بر دیدگاه‌های نظری لایمن تاور سارجنت و دیگران، این مطالعه نشان می‌دهد که چگونه ایشی‌گورو با نقد ساختارهای اجتماعی-سیاسی، عنصری از امید را حفظ می‌کند که مشخصهٔ پادآرمانشهرهای انتقادی است. این رمان با تلفیق مضامینی همچون هویت، خودمختاری و کالایی‌سازی زندگی انسانی با چالش‌های زیست‌اخلاقی ناشی از پیشرفت‌های مهندسی ژنتیک و شبیه‌سازی، به کاوش در این مسائل می‌پردازد. در مرکز تحلیل، مفهوم آشنایی‌زدایی قرار دارد؛ تکنیکی ریشه‌دار در فرمالیسم روسی، که به گفته بوکر، نقشی کلیدی در روایت‌های پادآرمانشهری ایفا می‌کند. ایشی‌گورو با بیگانه‌سازی جهان آشنای مدارس شبانه‌روزی و روابط صمیمی، خوانندگان را به تأمل انتقادی دربارهٔ پیامدهای اخلاقی شبیه‌سازی و اهدای عضو دعوت می‌کند. هیلشام، با ظاهر ایده‌آل و فریب نهادی‌اش، نمادی از انسانیت‌زدایی و سرکوب سیستماتیک در این روایت است. علاوه بر این، مطالعه نشان می‌دهد که هرگز رهایم مکن از چارچوب‌های متعارف پادآرمانشهری فراتر می‌رود و با پرداختن دقیق به مفاهیمی چون حافظه، نوستالژی و ارتباطات شخصی، این عناصر را به‌عنوان سازوکارهای مقابله‌ای شخصیت‌ها معرّفی می‌کند و مقاومت خاموش آن‌ها در برابر سیستمی غیرانسانی را برجسته می‌سازد. ایشی‌گورو با ترکیب ناامیدی و بارقه‌های امید، خوانندگان را به بازاندیشی در ابعاد اخلاقی پیشرفت‌های علمی و شکنندگی انسانیت فرا می‌خواند. رمان هرگز رهایم مکن هنجارهای اجتماعی را به چالش می‌کشد و گفتمان مسائل اخلاقی و وجودی معاصر را غنی‌تر می‌سازد.

1. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro stands as a special figure in contemporary British literature, a writer whose work embodies the intersection of Japanese cultural heritage and British societal influences. Ishiguro himself has reflected on this duality in an interview, noting: "I'm not entirely like English people because I've been brought up by Japanese parents in a Japanese-speaking home... I do have a distinct background. I think differently, my perspectives are slightly different" (Swift & Ishiguro). This unique blending of cultural perspectives is evident throughout his eight fictional works, which have received international acclaim and recognition. Among his numerous accolades are the Nobel Prize in Literature (2017) and the Booker Prize (1989). His novels, characterised by their detailed exploration of human experience, have been translated into over fifty languages and adapted into critically acclaimed films, including *The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let Me Go*. Ishiguro's ability to fuse personal and cultural complexities with universal themes underscores his lasting impact on the literary world.

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) weaves a profoundly moving narrative that intricately intertwines elements of haunting mystery with a tender love story, all framed by the enduring theme of life's inherent fragility. Set in an alternate England of the late 1990s, the novel reflects contemporary bioethical dilemmas, particularly the debates surrounding stem-cell research in the United States and the United Kingdom during the early 2000s. These discussions, focused on the ethical implications of cloning to enhance human health, provide a significant backdrop to Ishiguro's exploration.

Beyond these scientific concerns, the novel also explores universal human experiences, such as the challenges of childhood bullying and the complexities of sexuality and relationships. A particularly poignant moment occurs when Miss Lucy, one of the guardians, reveals to the students the grim truth of their existence: their sole purpose is to donate their organs, a process that will ultimately lead to their premature deaths. This stark disclosure of their predetermined fate drives the narrative forward, underscoring

the dehumanisation inherent in the societal constructs of Ishiguro's world. Through Kathy's perspective, Ishiguro subtly exposes the profound dissonance between the clones' normalised treatment and the reader's reality, prompting a critical reflection on the ethical and emotional implications of such a dystopian existence.

Science fiction occupies a unique and distinctive place within the diverse spectrum of literary genres. As Abrams and Harpham (2015) observe, it is defined by its depiction of "an imagined reality that is radically different in its nature and functioning from the world of our ordinary experience" (355). Whether set on distant planets, in speculative futures of the Earth, or within alternate universes, the genre often explores worlds that challenge the boundaries of human imagination. Central to these narratives are characters who resist or disrupt the prevailing systems, preventing these fictional environments from being classified as entirely utopian or dystopian.

It is within these complex, layered settings -- where the socio-political dynamics transcend simplistic binaries of utopia and dystopia -- that the notions of critical utopia and critical dystopia acquire their significance. Ishiguro's works vividly exemplify the characteristics of critical dystopia, using speculative elements to probe ethical dilemmas and human frailty. His narratives invite rigorous analytical attention by engaging with the interplay of hope and despair, agency and control, and personal identity within oppressive systems. As such, they expand the boundaries of the genre, offering profound insights into the human condition by means of speculative fiction.

2. Statement of the Problem

This paper explores the dystopian landscape of *Never Let Me Go*, weaving its narrative through the analytical threads of scholarship from the past three decades. Drawing on the insights of Sargent (1994), Booker (1994), Moylan (2000), Baccolini (2003), and others, it constructs a robust theoretical framework to interpret Ishiguro's subtle critique of contemporary societal constructs. Ishiguro's portrayal of England -- a world rife with ethical dilemmas and muted tragedies -- reveals a poignant tension

between utopian aspirations and the harsh realities of human fragility, creating a narrative both poetic and unsettling.

Drawing on the concept of critical dystopia, this study examines how Ishiguro balances despair with glimmers of hope, crafting a narrative that resonates with philosophical depth and emotional poignancy. The fictional experiences of Ishiguro's characters serve as a reflective mirror for broader human concerns, exploring themes of fate, autonomy, and systemic control. This reflective approach underscores the intricate balance of hope and despair, offering insights into the critical dystopian substratum that underpins the novel.

Moreover, *Never Let Me Go* transcends conventional categorisation within the critical dystopia genre by embracing ambiguity. Its restrained, understated prose avoids definitive answers, instead inviting readers to grapple with open-ended questions and uncover their own interpretations. Ishiguro's narrative style becomes an instrument of thematic exploration, creating a text that is at once elusive and deeply grounded in its critique of ethical and existential issues. This interplay of precision and ambiguity amplifies the novel's enduring impact, cementing its place as a cornerstone of critical dystopian literature.

3. Review of Literature

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) has been the focus of extensive scholarly analysis, approached from diverse critical perspectives. Claeys (2017) describes the novel as depicting a "consensually dystopian" society (484), encapsulating its unsettling depiction of collective complicity within a dystopian framework. In *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (Matthews & Groes, 2009), an entire chapter titled "On First Reading *Never Let Me Go*" provides an introductory analysis of the narrative and its characters, offering readers guidance on how to approach and interpret the novel. It notes that while the novel meticulously measures the passage of time, its chronology remains detached from any recognizable historical reality, thus creating a unique temporal dimension (104). Building

on such foundational studies, this review examines the evolving themes and techniques that underpin Ishiguro's narrative.

Nakamura (2021), in *On the Uses of Nostalgia in Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go*, explores the literary and thematic roles of nostalgia within the novel's dystopian setting. The study reflects on the emotional and psychological landscapes of clones in an alternate England, framing nostalgia as both a reflection of lost innocence and a subtle act of resistance. Positioned within a pastoral yet dystopian milieu, nostalgia transcends its conventional role of comforting recollection, instead becoming a lens through which identity and resilience against dehumanisation are critically examined. This review captures the argument that *Never Let Me Go* leverages nostalgia not merely as reminiscence but as a complex mechanism for exploring existential and societal struggles.

In the exploration of genre and realism within contemporary literature, the article "Sci-Fi Realism and the Allegory of Dystopia: With Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* as an Example", (Lu, 2020) examines the blend of science fiction elements with a realist aesthetic in the works of 2017 Nobel Laureate Kazuo Ishiguro. Focusing on Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, the article dissects the paradoxical approach of incorporating a sense of verisimilitude within a narrative structure that ostensibly opposes the traditional realist framework. This review seeks to unravel the article's investigation into the interplay between the seeming dichotomy of literary realism and the speculative nuances of science fiction. The article presents *Never Let Me Go* as a case study to question the origins of perceived realism in science fiction -- a genre typically set apart from realist novels. In the middle of the narrative of young clones facing an ominous future, Ishiguro crafts a world that resonates with readers through its authentic emotional landscape and societal insights, despite its sci-fi premise. The author of the article probes the intertwined relationship between the 'real' and the 'imagined,' and how this fusion generates universal and allegorical themes within the science fiction domain.

Pissa-ard (2020), in the article "Utopian Desire and Critical Dystopia in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Cormac

McCarthy's *The Road''*, argues that both novels exemplify key characteristics of critical dystopia and utopian desire as outlined by Lyman Tower Sargent and Ildney Cavalcanti. According to Pissa-ard, these works demonstrate how utopia functions not as a definitive blueprint for an ideal society but as a conceptual desire that catalyses processes of seeking alternative ways of being (28). The article further highlights that the novels share the hallmarks of critical dystopia, a sub-genre that Sargent identifies as using dystopian narratives to critique real-world issues while maintaining a utopian impulse (30). Central to this sub-genre, Pissa-ard contends, is the presence of hope, which remains an essential element within the otherwise bleak landscapes of critical dystopian fiction (33).

While Pissa-ard's analysis focuses on the interplay of utopian desire and critical dystopia, this article adopts a different perspective, concentrating on the defamiliarisation technique as discussed by Booker (1994) in relation to Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. This approach aims to examine how Ishiguro's use of defamiliarisation challenges conventional perceptions, fostering a critical engagement with the ethical and existential dilemmas depicted in the novel.

Eduardo Marks de Marques (2013) in his article "Dystopian Britain: Critical Utopia and the Politics of the Body in PD James's *The Children of Men*, Alfonso Cuarón's Film Adaptation, *Children of Men*, and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" which is part of his postdoctoral research in literary theory looks at the issues differently and affirms that his paper "seeks to analyse the forms in which this new form of utopian/dystopian literature explores the contemporary political climate in Great Britain in two novels and one film set in future or alternative present times" (1). He asserts that politics of the transhuman body is a significant component in these texts and that is: "social forms of dealing with or regulate corporality in a context of social and political changes in Europe where humanity is defined by a relation to technology with means to eliminate organic flaws (1).

Carroll (2010) in "Imitations of Life: Cloning, Heterosexuality and the Human in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" addresses

the complex portrayal of human cloning in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and explores its implications on norms of heteronormativity. Carroll argues that "[i]n order to trace how a fiction of human cloning might give rise to questions of heteronormativity, I will foreground issues of reproduction and their relationship to normative constructions of heterosexuality" (59), in other words, the examination of reproduction and its connection to conventional constructions of heterosexuality is essential in understanding how a fictional representation of human cloning can raise questions about heteronormativity. In addition, Carroll locates human cloning within the broader context of assisted reproductive technologies and discusses its potential to challenge the traditional presumption of heterosexual reproduction from feminist and queer perspectives (59). By examining the concept of the human from a unique standpoint, Carroll suggests that "the prospect of reproductive cloning reveals the way in which such beings, as 'copies' of human originals, challenge notions of the human, especially in relation to issues of individuality, authenticity and origin" (63), in other words, reproductive cloning exposes the ways in which these cloned beings, as copies of human originals, disrupt notions of what it means to be human, particularly in terms of individuality, authenticity, and origin.

In conclusion, despite the significant amount of existing literature on dystopian novels such as Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, it has to be thoroughly explored from the perspective of critical dystopia as introduced by Lyman Tower Sargent (1994) and defamiliarisation by Booker (1994). By examining *Never Let Me Go* vis-à-vis the characteristics of the term critical dystopia, this study contributes to the broader understanding of this work and its thematic complexities. It is hoped that this research will inspire further exploration of Ishiguro's and other contemporary dystopian novels using these theoretical frameworks, offering deeper insights into the genre.

4. Theoretical Framework

During the past thirty years, scholars like Lyman Tower Sargent in an article titled "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited"

(1994), Marvin Keith Booker in a book entitled *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* (1994), Tom Moylan in a book entitled *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Moylan & Piercy, 2000), Raffaella Baccolini in a book titled *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (Baccolini & Moylan, 2003), and others tried to refine and find the most reliable definition of the key terms such as Utopia, Eutopia, Critical Utopia, Dystopia, Critical Dystopia, regarding the development and emergence of literary works.

Sargent (1994) postulates that "[u]topia [is] a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space" (9), but "[e]utopian [is] a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view considerably better than the society in which that reader lived" (9), and the definition of "[d]ystopia or negative utopia [is] a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (9). Correspondingly, Sargent defines critical utopia as "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve and which takes a critical view of the utopia genre" (9). After this assertation, Sargent elaborates on critical dystopia and puts forward the poit whether critical dystopia is plausible. Finally, in an article, he defined it as "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia" (Sargent, 2001, 221).

As Booker (1994) views the case, defamiliarisation is the principal technique of dystopian fiction (19). This means that it presents stories in settings that differ from our own, either in time

or place. By doing this, dystopian fiction helps us see our own society in a new and fresh way. It challenges the things we take for granted or think are natural. Booker adds that this idea of presenting things in a new way is similar to what the Russian Formalists believed about literature, it also reminds us of Bertolt Brecht's idea of the alienation effect, which makes us think critically about what we're seeing (19). Dystopian fiction is often associated with science fiction, but it focuses more on social and political criticism. Booker claims that it is like the work of thinkers such as Nietzsche, Freud, Bakhtin, Adorno, Foucault, and Habermas, who also explore these kinds of issues; and asserts that, in fact, this study looks at the connections between dystopian fiction and the ideas of these critics (19). Booker asserts that "[t]his ability of literature to renew and enrich our perceptions of reality is obviously central to the utopian project, but defamiliarization is clearly the principal dystopian technique as well" (175). Defamiliarisation serves multiple purposes in the literature. It can challenge societal norms, question established conventions, and prompt readers to engage more actively with the text. By defamiliarising the familiar, authors can encourage readers to question their assumptions, broaden their perspectives, and gain new insights into the world around them.

    One can say Moylan's framework is feasibly the most useful for examining critical dystopias; it is by no means perfect and is at times unnecessarily restrictive. Moylan (Moylan and Piercy, 2000) identifies critical dystopian literature as a response to a specific political moment and claims the final two decades of the twentieth century as the critical dystopian era (183). In Moylan and Piercy's (2000) book, Moylan discusses Baccolini's note that critical dystopian novels blur the lines between various genres, allowing the works to be "multi-oppositional" and to renew the "resisting nature" of dystopian science fiction (189). Moylan asserts that critical dystopias, however, preserve hope in ambiguity and create a "counter-narrative" of "social possibilities that are radically other" (191). It is: "a textual form that leads toward Utopia by way of dialectical negation, for it negotiates the conflict between Utopia and Anti-Utopia, not in a way that displaces or diffuses that

historical contestation but rather invokes Utopia within its own cultural intervention in a time when such oppositional impulses are suppressed or compromised" (191-192).

In Baccolini and Moylan's (2003) view, dystopia is not the opposite of utopia and can function to foreground the wrongs and problematic issues of the current world (109). In other words, a utopian impulse that encourages the imagining of alternatives can be discerned even in a fictional work that appears to be dystopian. It is also not uncommon for utopia and dystopia to co-exist, as a utopia for one section of society may force other members to endure a dystopian existence (109). According to Baccolini and Moylan, other essential characteristics of critical dystopia include open-endedness and genre-blurring (7). They also distinguish that, whereas dystopia is traditionally associated with "a bleak, depressing genre with little space for hope within the story," (7) critical dystopias "allow both readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse within the work, for characters and readers alike" (7). They put forward that "critical dystopias resist genre purity in favour of an impure or hybrid text that renovates dystopian sf by making it formally and politically oppositional" (7). This conservation of hope with the expression of "an emancipatory, militant, critical utopian position" within the narrative generates what is now called the critical dystopia.

5. Critical Dystopia in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

The story opens with Kathy H., the protagonist, introducing herself as a 31-year-old carer, a role she has held for over eleven years with plans to continue for eight more months. The longevity of her career is not a testament to her exceptional skill, as even less competent carers have held their positions for similar lengths of time. However, Kathy takes pride in her work, particularly in the ability to keep her donors calm and to perform their recoveries beyond expectations. She exhibits a sense of humility but also prides herself on her intuitive understanding of donors' needs, balancing when to provide comfort or when to encourage independence: "I've developed a kind of instinct around donors. I

know when to hang around and comfort them, when to leave them to themselves; when to listen to everything they have to say, and when just to shrug and tell them to snap out of it (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 3).” One can say, from the beginning of the story we witness clones that passively accept their fates without any protest which is not normal and starkly different from the reader's everyday world. In this fictional world, the way the clones are treated appears normal in the eyes of both the clones and human beings.

Kathy defends the necessity of an emotional respite for carers, positing that choosing whom to care for, particularly those from Hailsham is a self-preservative act rather than one born out of favouritism or elitism. This personal connection enables her to sustain the emotional demands of the role while reuniting with her childhood friends Ruth and Tommy. Nevertheless, as time progresses and fewer donors from her past remain, Kathy acknowledges that these choices have lessened, and the realisations of the job's difficulties without personal connections are hitting home as she nears the conclusion of her professional journey.

The concept of critical dystopia can be analysed through the portrayal of a society where the characters are forced into the role of carers for donors. The theme of self-preservation and the impact of personal connections are prevalent, highlighting the flaws and difficulties within this dystopian world. The mention of Hailsham, the characters' alma mater, serves as a backdrop to emphasise the significance of personal connections. Kathy defends the choice of caring for those from Hailsham as a self-preservative act rather than favouritism or elitism. This suggests that in this dystopian society, personal connections, especially with childhood friends like Ruth and Tommy, become essential for the emotional well-being of the carers. It implies that the emotional respite gained from reconnecting with familiar faces helps sustain them in their demanding roles.

However, as time progresses and fewer donors from Kathy's past remain, she begins to realise the limitations of relying solely on personal connections. This realisation highlights the difficulties of the job without these emotional ties. The narrative suggests that the dystopian society puts a heavy emotional toll on the carers,

making it necessary for them to form personal connections as a means of coping. Without such connections, their ability to handle the challenges of the job diminishes. This portrayal illuminates the critical aspects of this dystopian world. The society forces individuals into roles that require immense emotional labour, and the sustenance of personal connections becomes crucial for survival in such circumstances. It highlights how the system ultimately devalues the lives and well-being of both the carers and donors, as they are trapped in an oppressive and emotionally draining system: "I'm not the first to be allowed to pick and choose, and I doubt if I'll be the last. And anyway, I've done my share of looking after donors brought up in every kind of place. By the time I finish, remember, I'll have done twelve years of this, and it's only for the last six they've let me choose (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 4)".

One could say, the text uses the concept of critical dystopia to explore the themes of self-preservation, personal connections, and the emotional demands of the carers' roles. It critiques the dystopian society by revealing the difficulties faced by the characters and the limitations of relying solely on personal connections for emotional respite.

Kathy contemplates the lure of nostalgia for Hailsham and her initial resistance to it, eventually succumbing to the memories of her upbringing there. This surrender to her past is exemplified in the story of a donor she cared for whose interest in her Hailsham childhood revealed a yearning to be part of that shared history, to the point of blending his memories with hers. Through this interaction, Kathy understands the profound gratitude for her seemingly privileged upbringing at Hailsham amid the stark reality of her and the donors' fates. This epiphany about her past reinforces the notion that the seemingly idyllic recollections of Hailsham serve not just as fond memories but as a psychological sanctuary for her and the donors facing grim futures -- an essential aspect of her coping mechanism in the critical dystopian context she exists within.

The mention of Hailsham and Kathy's initial resistance to it represents the yearning for a seemingly perfect past or utopian

society. In critical dystopias, this desire for a better past often serves as a contrast to the bleak reality of the present, emphasizing the flaws and injustices of the dystopian society. Furthermore, Kathy's surrender to her past and her willingness to blend her memories with those of another donor reflect the concept of false consciousness or the acceptance of the dominant ideology. In critical dystopias, the ruling authorities often manipulate or control the perceptions and memories of individuals, leading them to believe they are living in a harmonious society. Kathy's blending of memories highlights the malleability of truth and memory in the dystopian context. The idea of Hailsham serving as a psychological sanctuary for Kathy and the donors demonstrates the importance of escapism and coping mechanisms in critical dystopias. The idyllic recollections of Hailsham provide solace and a temporary escape from the harsh realities of their lives, showcasing the necessity of finding refuge or hope amidst an oppressive and limiting system.

In the story's critical dystopian context, Kathy's narrative captures the intricate dance between systems of control and the quest for personal identity and human connection -- themes central to Ishiguro's subtle examination of what it means to be human under oppressive societal structures. Kathy's recounting of these formative experiences illustrates her gradual awareness of her place within a society designed to exploit her capacities as both caregiver and organ donor, sharpening the text's critique of such exploitative structures.

The concept of critical dystopia can be analysed through the experiences of the characters in the narrative. The dystopian elements can be identified through the oppressive control exercised in Hailsham, the ignorance of the truth about their purpose, and the manipulation of the characters' emotions. Hailsham represents a dystopian institution where the students are raised with limited knowledge and sheltered from the truth about their future as donors. This control exercised by those in power restricts the characters' freedom and agency, denying them the opportunity to make informed choices about their own lives. This lack of autonomy and constant surveillance reflects a dystopian society

that governs and manipulates its citizens for its own benefit. Furthermore, the idea of a private myth about Norfolk being a repository for lost items can also be seen as a representation of a critical dystopia. The characters' belief in this myth serves as a form of escapism, providing them with comfort and hope in a world where they have little control over their own fate. However, this belief is ultimately shattered when they realise the truth about their purpose as donors, highlighting the oppressive nature of their existence.

Additionally, the loss of Kathy's tape and Ruth's attempt to make amends reflects how the characters' emotions are manipulated within the dystopian society. Kathy's attachment to the tape symbolises her desire to hold onto something meaningful and personal in a world where individuality is suppressed. Ruth's gesture of giving Kathy a new tape can be interpreted as an attempt to manipulate her emotions and alleviate guilt for past transgressions. This manipulation of emotions by the characters and their willingness to accept superficial forms of compensation further illuminates the dystopian nature of their society. The narrative exemplifies critical dystopia through the oppressive control exercised in Hailsham, the ignorance of the truth about their purpose, and the manipulation of the characters' emotions. The concepts of restricted freedom, the distortion of reality, and the exploration of power dynamics contribute to the portrayal of a critically dystopian society in the text.

The story from chapter seven to nine focuses on Kathy H. while she tackles the period of adolescence at Hailsham, which she recalls as more sombre and rifer with the dawning realisation of their predetermined fates as donors. She reflects on how her conversation with Tommy by the pond marked a turning point, leading her to question the world around her more critically, particularly the elusive behaviour of Miss Lucy, one of the guardians. As Kathy observes Miss Lucy more closely, she notes small but significant behaviours indicating Miss Lucy's internal conflict over how much the children should be told about their future roles. Kathy attributes deeper significance to these observations based on later events, such as a moment when Miss

Lucy seems disturbed by a student's hypothetical scenario regarding electric fences:

> [t]here was the time, … when Miss Lucy was taking us for English. We'd been looking at some poetry, but had somehow drifted onto talking about soldiers in World War Two being kept in prison camps. One of the boys asked if the fences around the camps had been electrified, and then someone else had said how strange it must have been, living in a place like that, where you could commit suicide any time you liked just by touching a fence. … Then … she pulled herself together, smiled and said: "It's just as well the fences at Hailsham aren't electrified. You get terrible accidents sometimes. (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 78)

The guardians, though stowing hints about the children's purpose, maintain a cloud of ambiguity that distorts their full understanding of their fates, a key trait of a critical dystopia.

In the second part of the novel, Kathy reflects on the time after Hailsham, as she and her friends transit to life at the Cottages, which serves as their interim home before they enter society to fulfil their donor destinies. The shift from Hailsham to the Cottages is depicted as significant, with the loss of Hailsham's guardians and structure forcing the students to adapt and rely on themselves and each other, a key aspect of growing up in their dystopian reality.

The concept of 'possibles', or the original humans from whom the clones were copied, becomes a fixation among the students. They grapple with the desire to unearth their origins while simultaneously fearing the implications. This theme highlights the characters' innate need to understand their identities beyond their societal roles, which is a classic trait of critical dystopia, drawing attention to the intersection of personal agency and systemic control:

> [t]he basic idea behind the possibles theory was simple, … [i]t went something like this. Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life. … That's why, when you were out there yourself—in the towns, shopping centres, transport cafés—you kept an eye out for "possibles" … [b]ut others

> claimed this was sentimental. Why would there be a
> "natural" generation between us and our models?
> (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 139)

Ruth's reaction to seeing her 'possible', a woman working in an office, brings disappointment and lays bare the stark contrast between the students' dreams and their preordained fates. Her acknowledgment that they come from 'trash' reveals a self-awareness and acceptance of their lower status in society, underpinning the dystopian theme of dehumanisation.

As Kathy's narrative unfolds, exploring her personal growth and the disintegration of her friendships, it highlights the underlying theme that despite their upbringing at Hailsham, the characters are not spared from the human experiences of jealousy, love, betrayal, and longing. Her ultimate decision to begin her training as a carer marks the end of an era and the beginning of compliance with the system -- a poignant moment that encapsulates the critical dystopian essence of the story as the characters move inexorably toward their predetermined purpose.

As the narrative nears resolution, Kathy finds herself adrift in contemplation, with her past and Hailsham's significance as her co-pilots. Amidst the pastoral stillness of the Norfolk fields, she indulges in soft reverie that conjures in her a gentle vision of Tommy:

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> I found I was standing before acres of ploughed earth.
> There was a fence keeping me from stepping into the
> field, with two lines of barbed wire, and I could see how
> this fence and the cluster of three or four trees above me
> were the only things breaking the wind for miles. All
> along the fence, … all sorts of rubbish had caught and
> tangled. … That was the only time, as I stood there,
> looking at that strange rubbish, feeling the wind coming
> across those empty fields, that I started to imagine just a
> little fantasy thing, because this was Norfolk after all, and
> it was only a couple of weeks since I'd lost him. I was
> thinking about the rubbish, … and I half-closed my eyes
> and imagined this was the spot where everything I'd ever
> lost since my childhood had washed up, and I was now
> standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a
> tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field,

and gradually get larger until I'd see it was Tommy, …
[t]he fantasy never got beyond that—I didn't let it—and
though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn't sobbing or
out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the
car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be.
(Ishiguro, 2005, pp. 287-288)

In this part, elements of critical dystopia can be identified
through the portrayal of the character Kathy's contemplation and
her connection to her past, particularly her memories of Hailsham
and the significance it holds for her. The description of the Norfolk
fields presents a seemingly idyllic setting with pastoral stillness,
but it also has a darker undertone. The presence of a fence and the
barbed wire surrounding the ploughed earth suggests control and
restriction, symbolising the oppressive social structure that governs
Kathy's world. The debris caught along the fence, brought by the
wind from afar, represents the remnants of lost and discarded
things. This can be interpreted as a metaphor for the discarded and
neglected human lives within this dystopian society.

Kathy's contemplation reveals her longing for connection and
a sense of belonging, as she envisions her lost friend Tommy
appearing on the horizon. However, this 'fantasy thing' is quickly
dismissed, highlighting the limitations and restrictions imposed
upon individuals in this society. The tears rolling down Kathy's
face symbolise her suppressed emotions and the stifled expression
of her true feelings. The enduring tapestry of memories that Kathy
clings to represents her struggle to maintain her personal humanity
amidst the dehumanising conditions of her society. These
memories serve as a testament to the deeply rooted human desire
for connection and personal identity. Kathy's memories of
Hailsham, Tommy, and Ruth serve as a form of resistance against
the dehumanising effects of the societal paradigm. Ultimately, it is
the enduring tapestry of memories -- of Hailsham, of Tommy, of
Ruth -- that Kathy clings to as the vestiges of identity, even as the
physical reminders of her formative years recede. These memories
stand as a staunch testament to the persistence of personal
humanity, enduring resolutely within the confines of a constraining
and unyielding societal paradigm.

Moreover, one can say Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* employs the technique of defamiliarisation to create a poignant and unsettling narrative that examines the value of life and the ethics of scientific progress. This novel, set in a familiar yet distinctly alternative England, defamiliarises the reader's understanding of humanity through the lives of seemingly normal children who are gradually revealed to be clones, bred specifically for organ donation. The uncanny atmosphere of Hailsham, the boarding school where these cloned children reside, operates as the primary site of defamiliarisation. Ishiguro employs a subtle, subdued tone and language, which, when juxtaposed with the horror of the children's fates, encourages readers to reflect critically on the narrative. The ordinary and the extraordinary collide through the children's day-to-day experiences, moments of intimacy, and their inescapable destiny. It unsettles the reader because it takes the familiar setting of a school – a place associated with growth, learning, and potential – and impregnates it with a sense of quiet dread and inevitability.

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The characters in *Never Let Me Go* – Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth – lead lives that are both intimately recognisable and harrowingly foreign. The novel's disquieting power lies in its ability to take the familiar -- a love triangle, the pains of growing up -- and refract it through the unsettling reality of the clones' purpose. This estrangement evokes critical thinking, mirroring the Russian Formalist idea and Brecht's concept of the alienation effect, and draws a connection to current ethical debates on genetic engineering, organ donation, and the boundaries of scientific innovation. In essence, the defamiliarisation in *Never Let Me Go* serves as a literary technique that not only underpins the novel's critical dystopian theme but also challenges readers' preconceptions about life, freedom, and identity. By presenting a world where human life is commodified in a starkly understated manner, Ishiguro places readers in a position to re-examine and renegotiate the values and ethical standards of their reality. It is a deft narrative strategy that resonates with Booker's (1994) assertion of dystopian fiction as a mirror that reflects problematic social and political practices of the real world, encouraging readers

to recognise and interrogate those which might otherwise be taken for granted or deemed natural.

6. Conclusion

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* exemplifies critical dystopian literature by intertwining themes of identity, agency, and the ethical dilemmas posed by scientific advancements. Through defamiliarisation, Ishiguro crafts a narrative that disturbs the familiar, compelling readers to reflect on the commodification of life and the fragile boundaries of humanity. Set in a world where clones are created for organ donation, the novel juxtaposes the characters' deeply human experiences -- love, friendship, and loss -- with the stark reality of their predestined purpose. Ishiguro's restrained prose, coupled with an open-ended narrative, resists providing closure. Instead, it leaves readers grappling with profound questions about autonomy and ethical responsibility, hallmarks of the critical dystopia genre. The characters' quest for meaning and connection within an oppressive system underscores the resilience of human spirit, even in dehumanising circumstances. By blending despair with faint glimmers of hope, *Never Let Me Go* critiques societal structures while inviting reflection on contemporary issues like genetic engineering and biotechnological ethics. This study highlights the novel's enduring relevance, demonstrating how Ishiguro's subtle, poignant storytelling continues to resonate. Ultimately, *Never Let Me Go* is a call to interrogate societal norms, encouraging deeper engagement with the moral and existential questions that shape the human experience.

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