

Quest of Identity Amidst Myth in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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As understood by most of the readers myth is not just a narrative or something, which has its roots with some story. Myth presents a country, a culture and society. They are stories aiming to preserve the culture's history, teach and inform their people, explain their origin, and help people understand the world around them. The word 'Myth' comes from the Greek word 'mythos' meaning the story of the people, fiction, utterance, tale, and/or legend. The traditional definition of myth is a widely held idea or belief that is false or incorrect, but the myth definition in literature is vastly different. In literature, the word myth is used to describe a traditional story that typically aims to explain a natural or social phenomenon. In literary myths, the use of supernatural beings is common and the time usually dates back to a period of early history of the beginning of various civilizations. The use of myths in Modernist literature highlighted the classical tone of the age. Myth has a symbolic value; it condenses emotions and experiences. TS Eliot's *The Waste Land* is perhaps the most representative of Modernist works with a profusion of mythical usage. TS Eliot employed the mythical method to accentuate the experiences of loss of fertility and death in *The Waste land*, which are weaved together by the multi-perspective and mythical character Tiresias. James Joyce in *Ulysses* recreates the mythical Homeric Odysseus into the modern Leopold Bloom and narrates his mundane, sordid existence in an ironic epic manner. Eugene O'Neill in *Mourning Becomes Electra* adapts the Greek mythical Electra from Aeschylus' *Oresteia* into Lavinia Mannon. WB Yeats, like his admired predecessor Blake, undertook to construct his own systematic mythology based on historical, astrological and occult material and consisting of the Phases of the Moon, the Great Wheel and the Gyres, as expounded in *A Vision*

and embodied in a number of remarkable lyric poems such as *The Second Coming* and *Byzantium*.

Japanese Mythology covers almost two thousand years of Japanese myths that passed down orally from generation to generation. Most Japanese myths talk about creation of the world- natural forces, different Gods and Goddesses. Japanese literature throughout most of its history has influenced the cultural contact with neighbouring Asian literatures, most notably China and its literature. Early texts were often written in pure Classical Chinese. Kazuo Ishiguro is a well-known writer in the field of modern literature, and he is mostly praised for his distinctive narrative style, which skilfully combines aspects of myth and fantasy with the everyday realities of human existence. The existence of legendary aspects in Ishiguro's writings is examined in this abstract, bringing light on how they perform as allegorical and symbolic means of expressing important ideas and insights. He is one of the most critically acclaimed contemporary fiction authors writing in English. Kazuo Ishiguro (born November 8, 1954, Nagasaki, Japan) is a Japanese-born British novelist known for his lyrical tales of regret fused with subtle optimism. In 2017 he won the Nobel Prize for Literature for his works that "uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world." (Britannica). Ishiguro's first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), details the postwar memories of Etsuko, a Japanese woman trying to deal with the suicide of her daughter Keiko. Set in an increasingly Westernized Japan following World War II, *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) chronicles the life of elderly Masuji Ono, who reviews his past career as a political artist of imperialist propaganda. Ishiguro's Booker Prize-winning *The Remains of the Day* (1989; film 1993) is a first-person narrative, the reminiscences of Stevens, an elderly English butler whose prim mask of formality has shut him off from understanding and intimacy.

The paper explores the unconventional novel of Ishiguro, "*Never Let Me Go*". In this book Ishiguro creates a future society where human clones who were created solely for the purpose of organ donation must face their inevitable demise. This story reveals the painful and heart

breaking aspect of their life by striking a remarkable resemblance to the mythic paradigm of sacrificial beings, similar to soul-sucking creatures in folklore. The paper also explores how issues with memory and cultural forgetfulness are interwoven with the characters existence. The pervasive mist that covers the landscape symbolises a common myth of amnesia, mirroring the idea that the past can be buried and cast a long shadow over the present. This mythical mist turns into a striking allegory for the effects of erasing communal memory and the influence of historical narratives on the development of society. However, the novel is a beautiful love story which breakthrough the boundaries of the literary novel. *Never Let Me Go* is a 2005 science fiction novel by the British author Kazuo Ishiguro. It was shortlisted for the 2005 Man Booker Prize. Ishiguro's psychologically complex works draw on the tradition of the realist novel. He counts such authors as Charlotte Brontë, Anton Chekov, Charles Dickens, and Fyodor Dostoevsky among his literary influences. Ishiguro identifies as an international writer. He does not see his work as part of a Japanese literary tradition, and has stated that he is more influenced by Japanese films than literature. Although raised in a Japanese-speaking home, Ishiguro did not return to Japan until he was an adult, visiting briefly in 1989 as part of the Japan Foundation Short-Term Visitors Program. *Never Let Me Go* is Ishiguro's sixth novel. Blending psychological realism with science fiction, it takes place in a parallel universe in 1990s England where human cloning is an accepted practice. His first-person narrator is Kathy H., a clone engaged in recalling and reflecting on her memories of the past. Ishiguro began writing *Never Let Me Go* in 1990, when he referred to it as "The Students' Novel." His early notes featured a group of strange students living in the countryside, an image that remained core to the finished novel.

The dreamy nature of Kazuo Ishiguro's writings, which explore complex philosophical and existential issues, distinguishes his works. Ishiguro's novels are not only literary masterpieces but also modern myths that have a significant emotional impact on readers thanks to the mythic aspects he incorporates into his stories. These components give readers

a singular lens through which to consider the universal problems of human existence. In one of the most memorable novels of recent years, Kazuo Ishiguro imagines the lives of a group of students growing up in a darkly skewered version of contemporary England. The Sunday Times quotes the book as one of the piercing questions about humanity and humaneness. A clear frontrunner to be the year's most extraordinary novel, *Never Let Me Go* is the third book in what could be called Kazuo Ishiguro's Bewilderment Trilogy. Like its predecessors, *The Unconsoled* (1995) and *When We Were Orphans* (2000), it is riddled with mystery. The girl named Kathy, a thirty one year old is living in England in the late 1990s, looks back at her school days at Hailsham, a picturesque establishment nestling amidst quiet countryside, an unsettling strangeness emanates from her reminiscences. What initially seems a near idyll of benign teachers, lively students, stimulating classes, sporting triumphs on the playing fields, midnight gossips in the dorm and friendly strolls around the pond with its bulrushes and wildfowl assumes an increasingly out of true aspect. Graceful and grim, the novel never hardens into anything as clear-cut as allegory but it resonates with disquieting suggestiveness (Sunday Times 2005)

The myth present in the novel; is the interpretation of the song, *Never Let Me Go* by Judy Bridgewater album *Songs after Dark*. Listening to the song she creates a myth that she will never have the pleasure of having her loved ones. Her favorite track on the album, "Never Let Me Go," gives the novel its title. The song symbolizes both the depths of human love and the fear of losing those whom one loves. This becomes clear in the story that Kathy invents to explain the song's lyrics. Kathy imagines that the song is about a woman afraid of losing her baby. Holding tightly to the child, she sings a song that expresses her happiness as well as her fear of loss. This image of holding on recurs several times in the novel, most notably when Kathy and Tommy hold one another in the field after learning that deferrals do not exist. When the tape itself disappears, Kathy has her first experience of loss that presages the losses she will later experience on a much larger and more human scale. Kathy has created the Myth that she will lose whomsoever she

loves. This thought of loss is so much engraved in her mind that often the idea manifests in her life. She is quite successful in creating the modern myth that whatever is coming to you is a signal that you will soon manifest it in your life. The issue with the protagonist was that she always thought of negative ideas and they manifested it.

In 1990, even before starting *The Unconsoled*, Kazuo Ishiguro had been working on a project called “The Students’ Novel,” about “these strange young people living in the countryside, calling themselves students where there’s no university.” (23). *Never Let Me Go* is a story of three friends who grow up in an enclosed environment, a kind of boarding school. The children were growing in this confined environment and developing a myth that parentless children are not complete. Sexton comments that realization of the truth about the situation is gradual. There is no startling reveal, no single shocking disclosure of where to head. Rather, just as the children themselves only slowly come to understand their fate. It is likewise the case of the readers; only piece together the implications gradually, as most of the humans do in life. In fact, the word “clone” appears for the first time only in Chapter 14, in Ruth’s tirade about the students modelled on “trash,” long after the term will have occurred to the mind of every reader. Apparently, a work of science fiction, *Never Let Me Go* is indeed nothing of the kind. Ishiguro says he’s perfectly open to people reading it as a chilling warning about biotechnology but feels they’ve missed the inner heart of the book if they take it that way. He has certainly given readers nothing to foster such a misreading. For the book is set in the past, not the future: “England, late 1990s” it is specified before the novel begins.

The narrator of the novel, Kathy H, is thirty-one as the book unwraps, and has been a “carer” for around twelve years. She looks back to her phase at that school she remains very proud to have attended, Hailsham, recalling first when she and her friends were children there, and then when they were teenagers, so locating it in the early and later Seventies, perhaps. Thereafter, in Part Two, she tells about their lives afterwards, in “the Cottages” (5) as young adults, perhaps in the early Eighties. But such dating is never precise and there are few contemporary references.

There is virtually no reference to technology, afar unexciting cars, Rovers and Volvos, and old-fashioned cassette tapes and Walkmans. Practically nothing about the authentic natal position of the clones is detailed either—neither how they were created, nor how they can make their “donations” and continue for a while to live. There is no information provided to the readers how the clones are going to change the society. Quite remarkably, there are simply no futuristic, alternative world or science-fiction components to the story. For what this book is about is ordinary, normal and every day, the knowledge that we are mortal, that our time is limited, death inescapable.

However on giving it an artificial touch of mid art and myths, the story is suggesting a development of myth of manifesting the ideas of past. In his invariably clear and modest way, Ishiguro describes this radical narrative thus: “The strategy here is that we’re looking at a very strange world, at a very strange group of people, and gradually, I wanted people to feel they’re not looking at such a strange world, that this is everybody’s story.” (7). Ishiguro himself compares his ellipticality to that found in songs that contain many more hidden things than the average prose story. “You’re going to try to structure the unsaid things as finely and narrowly as you structure the said things. So you often leave out explicit mean-ings. You deliberately create spaces in the songs for the person listening to inhabit,” he told Alan Yentob in a 2021 Imagine TV profile. So it becomes your own story—rather as Kathy makes her own interpretation of the song “Never Let Me Go.” One of the repeated criticisms of Ishiguro’s work remains that the prose is plain and flat. Revisiting *Never Let Me Go*, Rachel Cusk termed it his “‘dead hand’ approach.” In a peculiarly dim review of *Never Let Me Go* in the *London Review of Books*, Frank Kermode recognized that the prose was appropriate to the character of Kathy but found the writing less engaging than in Ishiguro’s previous books: “Everything is expertly arranged, as it always is in Ishiguro, but this dear-diary prose surely reduces one’s interest.” (*London Review*).

Ishiguro likes to experiment with literary hybrids, to hijack popular forms for his own ends, and to set his novels against tenebrous historical

backdrops. The narrator, Kathy H., is looking back on her school days at a superficially idyllic establishment called Hailsham. (As in “sham”; as in Charles Dickens’ Miss Havisham, exploiter of uncomprehending children.) At first you think the “H” in “Kathy H.” is the initial of a surname, but none of the students at Hailsham has a real surname. Soon you understand that there’s something very peculiar about this school. Tommy, for instance, who is the best boy at football, is picked on because he’s no good at art: In a conventional school it would be the other way around. (Brave New World). One motif at the very core of *Never Let Me Go* is the treatment of out-groups, and the way out-groups form in-groups, even among themselves. The marginalized are not exempt from doing their own marginalization: Even as they die, Ruth and Tommy and the other donors form a proud, cruel little clique, excluding Kathy H. because, not being a donor yet, she can’t really understand (Atwood).

Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro is a dystopian story about fate and friendship. The story illustrates complex themes such as the fate of human beings, the impact of childhood, and the complexities of friendships. The writer, Nobel-winner Kazuo Ishiguro, stated “growing up in England in a Japanese household was crucial to his writing, enabling him to see things from a different perspective to many of his British peers” (BBC, 2017). Allegedly, the novel is surely just another massive Ishiguro tease - *Never Let Me Go* is about a group of genetically engineered or test-tube children living in a comfortable country house called Hailsham. Here there is a sports pavilion and a playing field, and the students do ordinary things like playing rounders. From the uneasy opening lines onwards, we know there is something special about these children. They have no parents, no surnames, they never go on holiday, and they will never have babies of their own. They are being exclusively bred to become “donors”(9). The particular meaning of this ominous word is not made clear until page 73, when one of their more outspoken guardians suddenly blurts it all out. “None of you will go to America,” she tells her charges. “None of you will be film stars... Your lives are set out for you. You’ll become adults, then... you’ll start to donate your

vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do"(24).

From his semi-detached house in suburban Golders Green, in north London, Kazuo Ishiguro has made himself an architect of singular, self-enclosed worlds. His writing traps the readers inside strange skulls. He spends, he says, around five years on each of his books and the first couple of these years, each time, involves little circumnavigations of the imaginative space of his novel, marking boundaries, testing structures, making himself at home. All of his quietly unsettling, intimate vantages have foundations in the voices that narrate them and he spends a good deal of time, too, 'auditioning' these voices, listening to different possibilities, before he settles on one. The voice of his new, oppressively brilliant novel, *Never Let Me Go*, is that of Kathy H, who at 31 is looking back on her curious English boarding-school days at a place called Hailsham. Kathy's world seems so logical and mundane, the surface of her language so steady and familiar, that it takes the reader a little time to discover the disturbing facts of the lives she describes. The first clue comes in her use of simple little euphemisms: she is a 'carer', these days, she explains, she looks after 'donors' before they 'complete'; she remains in thrall to the 'guardians' who taught her at school. The full implications of these charged little power relations emerge from her account very slowly. It is, hopefully, not giving away too much of Ishiguro's meticulous dystopia to say that Kathy and all the rest of the children who were at Hailsham are clones and that their macabre stories expand. Ishiguro is very good at seeing the sinister and chaotic where most of us, including his narrators, might kid ourselves we see normality (*The Guardian*). To the interview to *The Guardian* Ishiguro says, "for me England is a mythical place" (2

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