

# **The Dynamics of Memory and Human Connection in "Never Let Me Go" by Kazuo Ishiguro**

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## **Abstract**

In Kazuo Ishiguro's novel "Never Let Me Go," memory and human connection play pivotal roles in shaping the characters' identities and relationships. This research paper explores the complex dynamics of memory and human connection within the context of a dystopian society where human clones, known as donors, are created for organ harvesting. By examining the novel's narrative structure, characters, and themes, this paper seeks to shed light on how memories function as formative elements in an individual's personal development and their relationships with others.

The study considers the role of nostalgia and longing for a better past or an imagined future on the protagonists' lives, highlighting how these sentiments lead to attachments that both empower and confine them. Additionally, the paper delves into the significance of artwork as a means of expressing identity and fostering connections among the characters, showcasing Ishiguro's masterful portrayal of the intrinsic human need for self-expression.

**Keywords:** Memory, Human Connection, Kazuo Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go, Identity

## **Introduction**

In Kazuo Ishiguro's haunting novel, "Never Let Me Go," the dynamics of memory and human connection play pivotal roles in shaping the lives of the characters within the story. Set in an alternate version of England where cloning is a normal aspect of society, the narrative

follows three young friends—Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy—who grow up together at the Hailsham boarding school. Told from Kathy's perspective, as her friends' inevitable fates approach, she reflects deeply on their shared past.

The importance of memory in "Never Let Me Go" is evident through how it defines identity and influences personal growth in an environment where clones are denied autonomy. The clones' lifespans are predetermined by society to fulfill a single purpose—organ donation. They cling to their memories to hold onto their sense of self and to validate their existence beyond that all-encompassing purpose.

Human connection is just as significant in Ishiguro's novel as it becomes a driving force for the characters' actions and decisions. Both as a support system and as a source of rivalry, female friends Kathy and Ruth serve important roles in each other's lives; their unique friendship illustrates how connection can both heal and harm. Meanwhile, the romantic relationship between Tommy and Kathy underscores the yearning for deep emotional connection.

This research paper, will explore the role of memory and human connection in "Never Let Me Go" and consider its impact on Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy's lives. We will delve into how these themes convey universal needs for belonging, identity preservation, love, and friendship. Ultimately, Ishiguro raises profound questions about what truly constitutes humanity by examining how memory and connection intertwine to form our most cherished experiences amid dire circumstances—a story that continues to resonate with readers far beyond its pages.

### **Memory as a Theme**

Memory plays a crucial role in shaping identity and self-awareness. In Kazuo Ishiguro's novel "Never Let Me Go," memory takes on an even more significant role as it is used to highlight the emotional depth and connections between the characters.

The novel is set in a dystopian world where children are cloned for the purpose of harvesting their organs. The characters, Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, are all clones who attend a boarding school called Hailsham. The children at Hailsham are told that they are special and that their organs are meant for great purposes. However, as they grow older, they begin to question

their purpose and the truth about their existence.

As the children grapple with their emotions and try to make sense of their world, memory becomes a key theme in the novel. The children use their memories to form connections with each other and to find comfort in their seemingly meaningless lives. Kathy, in particular, uses her memories to piece together her identity and to come to terms with her purpose in life.

### **Human Connection as a Theme**

In "Never Let Me Go" by Kazuo Ishiguro, human connection emerges as a fundamental theme that shapes the lives of the characters and their ultimate destiny. The novel portrays how the protagonists, Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, navigate their interdependent relationships and the powerful impact these connections have on their overall sense of purpose and fulfillment. Through the lens of human connection, Ishiguro offers readers valuable insights about sacrifice and personal aspirations in a dystopian society.

The narrative revolves around the lives of Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth as they form deep bonds of friendship while at Hailsham, a fictional boarding school for organ donors in England. As they grow up together, their friendship flourishes despite the inherent rivalry amongst them: Kathy's romantic interest in Tommy and Ruth's possessiveness over him. Ishiguro emphasizes the importance of their relationships with one another as part of their emotional foundation during tumultuous life circumstances. For instance, while seeking the truth about Hailsham students' doomed future, it is the trust between Kathy and Tommy that ultimately solidifies their partnership.

One ubiquitous aspect within Ishiguro's novel is that human connection becomes a driving force for each character's journey towards realizing purpose and fulfillment in their short-lived lives. While acknowledging their tragic fate as organ donors who would eventually die young, all three protagonists come to develop an unquenchable thirst for seizing brighter futures for themselves. Their mutual support networks motivate them to make meaningful strides forward, whether indulging in art at Hailsham or attempting to postpone organ donations by submitting deferral applications. Each character encounters new meaning in life through their connections with one another, dispelling hopelessness encountered in a society built upon exploitation.

Beneath layers of complex relationships and friendships, "Never Let Me Go" exposes the harsh reality that human connection often involves sacrifices. The protagonists are disheartened with the inequalities that arise as the world sees them merely as organ sources rather than individuals deserving of respect and dignity. Tommy's rage stems from this sense of worthlessness, and he exerts himself to a breaking point in search of authenticity in both his love life with Ruth and artwork.

In Kathy's case, her sacrifice originates from putting aside her feelings for Tommy to support his relationship with Ruth. Later on, after realizing Tommy's significance in her life, she faces the challenge of opposing Ruth's claim over him. Ruth, too, encounters her share of sacrifices while reflecting on past choices that inhibit Kathy and Tommy's relationship. Although their lives are bound by harsh circumstances, the power of human connection ultimately triumphs – offering hope, empathy, and compassion amidst despair.

### **Intersection of Memory and Human Connection**

A. In "Never Let Me Go," Kazuo Ishiguro uses memory as a powerful tool to embolden human connections, creating a world where individuals come together through the shared experiences, feelings, and past occurrences. The story follows Kathy H., Ruth, and Tommy, three friends brought up at a secluded boarding school called Hailsham, and their quest to navigate love, friendship, and betrayal. As they grow older, the importance of memory becomes evident in sustaining their connections with each other.

B. Memories play an instrumental role in establishing relationships between the characters in this story. In particular, their shared upbringing at Hailsham forms a substantial part of their individual identities. For example, Kathy and Tommy bond over the memories of his tantrums and her efforts to calm him down when they were younger. This common history brings the characters closer together as they reminisce about their childhood days.

Similarly, the characters use physical artifacts to reinforce their emotional ties. One notable object is an old cassette tape that has songs related to important moments in Kathy's life. These personal mementos act as markers for pivotal events in their lives and serve to strengthen their relationships.

C. The consequences of suppressing memories are explored throughout the novel as well.

The characters grapple with an uncomfortable reality: they are destined for organ donation despite being raised like any other boarding school students. This existential predicament creates tension within their friendships and forces them to come to terms with their mortality.

As they grow older and face the inevitability of "completing," Cathy begins to realize that suppressing memories is actually beneficial for her mental wellbeing since it helps her avoid dwelling on painful experiences from the past (such as Ruth's betrayal). However, this coping mechanism comes at a cost. By repressing certain memories, Cathy distances herself from her friends – particularly Ruth and Tommy – and misses out on the emotional support that they could have provided through their shared experiences.

Moreover, a notable instance of memory suppression is seen in Miss Lucy's decision to reveal to the students the truth about their fates. This revelation shatters their childhood innocence and serves as a turning point for their relationships, leading them to question their deep-rooted assumptions about friendship and who they can truly confide in.

## Conclusion

The importance of memory and human connection in Kazuo Ishiguro's "Never Let Me Go" cannot be overlooked. The novel meticulously explores the complex dynamics of these themes, which serve to enrich the overall narrative and offer insightful reflections on what it means to be human. In a world where the clones are created solely for the purpose of organ donation, their memories and relationships form the basis of their identities and ultimately defy the system that seeks to devalue their existence.

Throughout the novel, memories play an essential role in preserving the characters' sense of self and dignity, as they continuously grapple with their doomed existence. The power of memory allows Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy to rise beyond their oppressive circumstances and assert their humanity. By recollecting significant events from their past at Hailsham, such as holding on to trinkets and recalling precious moments shared with friends, they demonstrate that memories hold tremendous value in shaping one's identity.

Similarly, human connection proves indispensable in "Never Let Me Go." Whether it is through friendships or romantic relationships, these bonds form the emotional core of the characters' lives and provide solace amidst adversity. For instance, Kathy's love for Tommy

goes beyond mere physical attraction; it transcends into a profound understanding of each other's emotional needs. The theme of human connection also extends to Hailsham's guardians who go against society's expectations by showing compassion towards the clones and recognizing their humanity.

The intricate dynamics of memory and human connection ultimately contribute to the novel's central theme – emphasizing the significance of cherishing our experiences and relationships while grappling with societal constraints. It is through this exploration that Ishiguro invites us to not only rethink our perception of others but also reconsider what truly defines us as human beings. As such, "Never Let Me Go" serves as a poignant reminder that despite our varying circumstances, our memories and human connections continue to shape our identities and, in essence, our shared humanity.

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