

**Memory - Confronting regret and Shaping Identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's
'Never Let Me Go'**

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Article Received: 20/07/2026

Article Accepted:22/08/2026

Published Online:23/08/2026

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.08.432

Abstract:

In the works of Kazuo Ishiguro Memory is functioning as a central aspect and performs the function of an unreliable tool for navigating the trauma of the past and its interpretation through nostalgia and self deception. His protagonists suffer from the state of fading memories and they are often aging people recalling the incidents in first person narrative reconciling their past and present. His characters are navigating through the past memories revealing self deception and regret to define their emotional and ethical existence. *Never Let Me Go* reflects Kathy's idea of clinging to the memories of Hailsham which behaves as a tool to navigate her flex and flux of identity. The paper examines the character, narrative technique and style of Ishiguro to employ memory as a powerful tool in shaping the identity in *Never Let Me Go* through the character of Kathy.

Keywords: Memory, Forgetting, identity , deconstruction

Introduction:

Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* presents the concept of memory in nuance where it is responsible to shape the identity of characters and their relationships. The work showcases the complex relationship existing between human mind and dynamics of memory in the context of a dystopian society where human clones known as donors are created for organ harvesting. The novel is an excellent work closely examining how memory acts as a formative element in the shaping an individual's personality and his relationship with others in the world. There is a blend of nostalgia and longing for a better past with an unpredictable future hanging on the lives of the protagonists. Sentiments and emotions lead to human attachment and at the same time these two things both empower and confine them.

There have been times over the years when I've tried to leave Hailsham behind, when I've told myself I shouldn't look back so much. But then there came a point when I just stopped resisting. It had to do with this particular donor I had once, in my third year as a carer; it was his reaction when I mentioned I was from Hailsham." (NLMG Chapter 1)

Kathy the narrator and protagonist introduces herself in the novel and establishes her relentless and characteristic impulse to look back at the bygone days. Kathy is trying her level best to get rid of the haunting memories of the past but still she has the remain of her memories at Hailsham which is now closed but she cannot forget Ruth and Tommy who once had been the integral part of her life. The title of the novel itself does not allow the memories to go but to hold on. It is a plea, demand and a deep human need to hold on the memories of her loved ones and their losses.

Though her memory is fragmented and incomplete still her narrative is a method of her recovery and act of consoling to make sense of the remains of the past she still carries. She admits that she may forget or be unclear in certain aspects of her past but her first person narration also highlights that absence of other character's memories. The readers are introduced to Ruth and Tommy only through the memories of Kathy however their own memories remain subdued .

The setting of the novel has been done in a dystopian society, an alternate version of England where human cloning is a normal aspect of the society . There are three friends - Kathy, Ruth and Tommy who grow up together studying in the same Hailsham Boarding school. The novel has been narrated from the perspective of Kathy. When her friend approaches the unpredictable and inevitable fate she gets nostalgic on their shared past. Memory plays an important role in this context as it reflects the impact on identity of an individual and his personal growth in an environment where clones are denied autonomy. The clone has no authority over his life and it is the society that determines his life span as they are raised to fulfil one single purpose and that is organ donation.

Ishiguro reflects that what constitutes humanity is the close connection between memory and connection with an individual that intertwine to form the most cherished experiences of life amidst the most dire and dreadful circumstances. In the context of the novel memory performs a crucial role as it highlights the emotional attachments and strong bonds between the characters.

The children are told in Hailsham that they are special and their organs are going to solve great purposes. Later as they grow older they have lot of questions in their mind for which they seek answers regarding their identity and purpose of their lives. The Hailsham students were accepted as the donors for real people and Kathy, Tommy and Ruth are clones and they are considered advantageous among all other students as they are fortunate enough

to be raised at Hailsham under the guidance of the Hailsham guards and were given lot of privileges over others.

Kathy utters - *I am a Hailsham student which is enough by itself sometimes to get people's backup* (NLMG 3) Hailsham identifies students through their artwork and creativity and at an instant Kathy speaks that the exchanges that were made in Hailsham four times a year, they had a kind of big exhibition cum sale of all the items they had created in the time period of three months since the last exchanges (NLMG, 15). The guardians acted as main judges to decide who created the best one.

The students at Hailsham were in the practice of treasuring their collection which to a great extent was the reflection of their personality and identity. The students desperately represented their individuality through their small treasured collection. Kathy strongly felt that how one was regarded at Hailsham, how much a student was liked and respected was quite evident from how good someone was at creating.

The idea itself justifies that humans are often in the practice of creating their self image through various modes of expression and in other aspects of their lives. In this context John Mullan says : *"So deep have these expectations been rooted that the students' failure to be explicitly appalled by their fate is something's felt as an offence against realism"* (105). Tommy felt unhappy at the Hailsham and the possible reason may be that he was not at all creative. The children wish to know the truth of their excellence and as they grapple with their emotions in order to make the sense of their world and existence , memory starts playing a key role in this context.

The children are making use of their memory to form connections with each other and they find their comfort in their meaningless lives they are leading at Hailsham. Kathy puts and assembles the pieces of her memory together and in this way her identity comes to proper terms with her purpose of life. In the novels of Ishiguro the human connections act as the driving force regarding the journey of the character and its development in the novel. Through this tool they are able to realize their purpose of life and the significance of short life. Once they recognize their tragic fate as the organ donors who will eventually die young , all the three protagonists develop an eternal thirst to achieve the most in their life and make each day important and wonderful. Through this incident Ishiguro expresses the human desire for the quest of knowledge of personal identity and uniqueness.

The students are identified through the innovation and uniqueness of their work and Kathy recalls this in saying - *"May be we all hand little secrets like that little private hooks created out of thin air where we could go off along with our fears and longings"* (NLMG, 68). Kathy wants to leave the group because she is much bothered about her personal identity and one day when Miss Lucy tells children that they are special, so they must keep themselves healthy inside and this is not only important for them but for her also (NLMG,

68). Later Kathy realizes - *that we are different from our guardians and also from the normal people outside; we perhaps even know that a long way down the line there were donations waiting for us*" (NLMG, 69). The idea of death has been signified by the word 'completion' and the students are often confronted with the reality of their donations. The term itself signifies that every student chosen as a donor is completing or fulfilling his duty and most of the students also have a realization that once chosen 'completion' inescapable.

There's definitely a mix of dependence and free will in the clones' very existence. On the one hand, they rely on their model as a "technical necessity." Without their model, they wouldn't be alive at all. But on the other hand, once they've been made, the clones have to fend for themselves. Chances are, they'll never see their model again.(NLMG Ishiguro) While Tommy is in the process of donation Kathy was his caretaker and she was also in love with Tommy. She notices that Tommy was always fully clothed as he did not want to be like patient (233). He never wanted Kathy to understand him as a patient because a patient has a different identity and he never wanted to have that identity. The relationship and love existing between Tommy and Kathy gives him a different identity and a hope for some delay. At that moment Kathy feels relieved and delighted.

This clearly reflects the growing love between Tommy and Kathy and is shown as a part of the identity and a way of shaping the identity. Love has been reflected as an aspect that gives a new meaning and hope to life. The students of Hailsham do not believe in the idea of having souls, however Kathy reflects her stable character through her behaviour while the equation between Tommy and Ruth is unstable. When Tommy and Kathy go to Miss Emily and talk about deferral she simply refuses the idea and says : So there's definitely nothing. No. deferral, nothing like that, Miss Emily said gently: No, Tommy. There's nothing like that. Your life must now run the causes that's been set for it" (NLMG, 261)

The three characters desperately search for the answers and the purpose and meaning of their life, they wish to know what makes up their life and their identity. The students at Hailsham find themselves thrilled with the predestined future and at times they think about the originals they were cloned from and this creates great confusion in their identity. At times they doubt that they have been created from trash.

According to this theory, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Or the clone doesn't fall far from her "possible." So finding your model would be like getting a cheat sheet for your own identity. But what part of your identity will you get to discover when you find this model? And what do you think Kathy means by the phrase "deep down"? Maybe she means she'll learn more about her personality. Or her soul. Or her DNA? (NLMG Ishiguro)

There is Deconstruction in the novel which breaks the binary opposition between human and clones and it challenges the notion of a unique authentic human subject. The

narration of Kathy in the novel clearly implicates that identities are constructed rather than essential which reveals clones to be just as humans who also have memories, art and emotions as the way society uses them. The novel unsettles the hierarchy between the humans and clones by showing the complexity of the character of clones who also have emotions and opposed to it he reflects the human society that is heartless to exploit them and their delicate feelings, therefore through the aspect of deconstruction the novel poses the biggest question as to who should be considered truly as a human, the human society of the clones who are exploited by humans?

The powerful narrative of Kathy and her retrospection highlights that identity can also be a narrative construction through the memory of which many pieces she is putting together of some faded memory at the Hailsham which might be subjective or unreliable also at the same time. The aspect of Otherness is evident when the clones are treated as others in the human society and just taken as agents of organ donation. The novel empathizes with the clones and questions the ethical, social and linguistic construction of the other.

Kathy, as the main narrator, exhibits symptoms of emotional dissociation, a condition in which the individual is detached from painful emotions or reality. Although she recounts a tragic past, her narrative style is calm, neutral, and even flat, with no expressions of anger, deep fear, or open rebellion against the system that oppresses her. This is not due to ignorance, but rather due to the trauma that drove her into a form of psychological coping through emotional distancing. In other words, Kathy "layers" trauma through an almost affectless storytelling style, a survival strategy that reflects dissociation.

As Ancet states, *A freak does not only blur certain knowledge, but it arouses a kind of discomfort because it represents a concept which was once familiar yet which is now unfamiliar* (2010: 102). In fact, the donors who are regarded as organs producer developed a sense of uncanniness since they are human but at the same time considered as body parts.

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