

REVIEW

Between Biotechnology and Ethics — A Review of Kazuo Ishiguro's "Never Let Me Go"

by Margarita Beatriz Escobar

SHORTLISTED FOR THE
MAN BOOKER PRIZE

'Brilliant . . . the most exacting
and affecting of his books to date.'
Observer

Kazuo
Ishiguro
Never
Let Me
Go

THE TOP TEN BESTSELLER

ff

We live in a world where medical scientific experimentation has ramifications that reach deep into every aspect of our lives. Its discoveries could help with a variety of aspects of human existence, such as finding cures for diseases, improving quality of life, or extending the life span itself. In general, the public may understand that there is a need for all of this and I consider myself one of those people. But I always asked myself about the ethical implications involved in the experiments themselves and this is the main reason I was so interested in reading this riveting novel by Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (2005).

Kazuo Ishiguro is one of the most celebrated fiction authors writing in English, being awarded the 2017 Nobel Prize in Literature and, in 2018, the Knighthood from the United Kingdom and the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star, from Japan, the country where he was born. His family moved to England when he was six years old, but he grew up in a home that kept all the traditions of his country of birth, from the language and food, to customs and family dynamics.



Kazuo Ishiguro © Creative Commons

In an interview in BOMB magazine (Fall 1989) he stated: “I’m not entirely like English people because I’ve been brought up by Japanese-speaking parents in a Japanese-speaking home. My parents felt responsible for keeping me in touch with Japanese values.” Ishiguro learned to adjust to British culture without forgetting his Asian roots and his first two novels *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist in the Floating World* were noted for his explorations of Japanese identity.

He obtained his Bachelor's degree from the University of Kent in 1978 and his Master's from the University of East Anglia's creative writing course in 1980. He became an English citizen in 1982.

The author wrote *Never Let Me Go* during a fast-moving period of development in the biological and medical sciences and the book was published in 2015. The novel is compelling, outstanding, and thought-provoking. It is considered dystopian science fiction and a dread-inducing horror narrative (a dystopia is an imaginary community or society that's dehumanizing and frightening. It is usually used in contrast to the term utopia, which

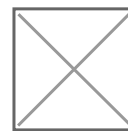
is a perfect society.)

I'm not a person that reads a lot of science fiction, but *Never Let Me Go* touched me deeply because it is a novel about what it means to be human and how we face our mortality. It is also a book about friendship and about longing for the past, as well as a novel which allows us to question the ethics of human cloning.

Our world is changing rapidly with the advancement of new technologies. In the last fifty years, we have witnessed huge progresses in every area of human knowledge. We can't remain oblivious to the ethical implications of the evolution of science and technology. I enjoyed this book because it allows biological and ethical ideas to play out in the background, while a very human story of love, loss, and maturation occurs in the foreground. The novel is primarily about human lives and the way all humans must deal with their particular fates.

In an interview with Nicholas Wroe for *The Guardian* in 2005, Ishiguro talked about *Never Let Me Go*: "There are things I am more interested in than the clone thing. How are they trying to find their place in the world and make sense of their lives? To what extent can they transcend their fate? Most of the things that concern them concern us all, but with them, it is confined to a short period of time. These are things that really interest me and, having come to the realization that I probably have limited opportunities to explore these things, that is what I want to concentrate on."

The novel takes place in a parallel universe in the 1990s in England, where human cloning is an accepted practice. The book tells the life of three friends — Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy — from their early school days into young adulthood, when the reality of the world they live in comes knocking at the door.



Kazuo Ishiguro's "Never Let Me Go"

The story starts with the narrator, Kathy sitting before the end of her life looking back at her childhood as a child in Hailsham, her school. At the beginning of the novel, we may assume that Hailsham is a pleasant boarding school, far from the influences of the city. Its students are well looked after and supported, trained in art and literature, and become just the sort of people that the world wants them to be. But, curiously, they are taught nothing of the outside world and are allowed little contact with it.

Within the grounds of Hailsham, Kathy grows from a schoolgirl to a young woman, but it is only when she and her friends Ruth and Tommy leave the safe grounds of the school that

they realize the whole truth of what Hailsham is: With horror, we discovered that Hailsham exists to raise cloned children who have been brought into the world for the sole purpose of providing organs to other normal people.

At the beginning of the book, I truly thought that the students at Hailsham were average humans, but through the novel, it becomes apparent that the student's situation is abnormal. I was in awe to discover they were clones.

Never Let Me Go shows what happens when society is allowed to use scientific experimentation freely and without considering the moral implications.

Never Let Me Go is a novel about ordinary human life, the human soul, human sexuality, love, creativity, and childhood innocence. We all relate to the feelings Kazuo Ishiguro touches in this outstanding book. I think this is one of the main reasons why this novel has been so well received by the public.

Curious to read more about Ishiguro's creative output? Read [this review](#) of his 1989 novel *The Remains of the Day* by our very own Lisa!