

# Theme of Homelessness in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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## Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro is one of the world's most important contemporary writers who has produced varied and interesting novels with several literary awards and consistent critical appreciation. The works of Ishiguro tend to be influenced by modern narrative comprising a harsher reality of prosperous lifestyle that followed the Second World War. The homelessness made him, neither a Japanese nor an English. After receiving the United States citizenship in 1982, he feels himself as a British rather than English. He admits that he has very little knowledge about Japan. But his writings still set in Japan or perchance in Japan. What Ishiguro feels as a writer, is the very lack of authority and lack of knowledge about Japan that forced him to use his imagination of Japan that ended up an imaginary Japan in his works. The present paper deals with the theme of homelessness in the novel *Never Let Me Go* in which he deals with the clones in an English boarding school leaving apart his imaginary Japan.

## Key words

Homelessness, Cyrenians, clones, carer, donar, complete, euphemerism

The Japanese-born British writer, Kazuo Ishiguro is a Nobel Prize winner, screen writer and short story writer. Born in Nagasaki in 1954, Ishiguro left Japan at the age of five and moved to England, where he turned to be a British citizen. The home of Ishiguro is midway from Japan and England and is caught between Japanese and English, "somewhere in-between departure and arrival, nostalgia and anticipation" (Lewis 1). On the other hand, critics like Shaffer wonder "in a century of British prose fiction heralded and shaped by such transplanted authors as the Polish Joseph Conrad and American Henry James, it is astonishing that "Kazuo Ishiguro, a Japanese-born British writer now ranks among England's most distinguished contemporary novelists" (1). Ishiguro worked with the homeless for a short spell in 1979 as a residential resettlement worker for the West London Cyrenians homeless charity in Notting Hill and the stay not only leads to the understanding of human awareness and suffering but also forms the backdrop in all his novels. While at the Cyrenians, (an organization who provide food, accommodation and welfare advice for itinerants) Ishiguro met Lorna Mac Dougall, a social worker who was also active in the organization later became Ishiguro's wife. This occupation helped Ishiguro to grapple with his own special form of homelessness and these empathies have roots in his novel *Never Let Me Go*. The novel focusses on childhood and adult experiences of human

pain and loss with hope and human endurance. This social work helped Ishiguro to understand the basic as well as psychological needs in such a way to wrestle with his own special form of homelessness.

The novel *Never Let Me Go*, is set in England, during 1990s that narrates the story of three friends, Kathy, Ruth and Tommy particularly clones, created to provide vital organs for the denizens of England. The clones who are brought up in an English boarding school in Hailsham, grow together and have to cross the three crucial stages in their life: “a carer,” (3) “a donor” (273) and finally “a complete” (273). The novel is narrated retrospectively by Kathy H, about her friends who grow together at Hailsham School during their childhood and how they come to reunite again in future during their adulthood. Kathy, a thirty one year old female protagonist narrates the story in the first person narrative, whose job description at the time of narration is a carer. The school where the children are brought up is a special school in which the children grow up with a dark and horrific future awaiting for them. The novel is divided into three parts: Part One depicts the childhood experience in the formative years in Hailsham School, Part Two centers on cottages, a place where the students spend their adulthood ending up their lives in Hailsham, ultimately Part Three deals with Kathy’s life as a carer, where Kathy is reunifying with Ruth and Tommy after a break. Ruth and Tommy died after donating their vital organs and Kathy is about to become a donor in the near future.

Hailsham is the only homely and comfortable atmosphere where the students study, play and grow up together. The school is in many facets a model of a typical public English School filled with exclusive terms like exchanges, tokens and sales. The students are uniformly kept under the vigilance of the guardians who are in fact the teachers at the school and not their real guardians. In *Never Let Me Go* the school is located in the middle of an unnamed countryside so that it is away from the civilization. Kathy’s recollections of Hailsham has always centers around happy moments of childhood experiences, and maintaining good rapport between the students of her batch with the former students. Moreover, Kathy always feels proud of their privilege upbringing in Hailsham and moments of happy days that other clones from other schools failed to experience. The children have to be accustomed to the uncomfortable home and have no means of knowing outside world. Hailsham forms a closed circuit, the absolute real of the clones’ experience, and the pedagogic doctrines of the school prevent them from accessing the real.

When Ruth and Kathy are twelve, Norfolk has become a big joke for them. Just like lorries come to Hailsham with food and stuff for sales, the vehicles move all over England “delivering anything left behind in fields and trains to this place called Norfolk,” (66) thus featuring the place as mystique. Their attitude towards Norfolk is strange at the same time remembering Hailsham Kathy says for the Hailsham students This might all sound daft, but you have to remember that to us, at that stage in our lives, any place beyond Hailsham was like a fantasy land; we had only the haziest notion of the world outside and about what was and wasn’t possible there (66), The children of Hailsham call the peaceful corner of England, Norfolk “a lost corner,” where all the lost property found in the country ended up” ( 65).

Ishiguro pays attention to hybrid cultural background where Ishiguro pursued postgraduate in a Creative Writing Course in Norfolk, East Anglia. Wai-chew Sim asserts “the clones and the other ‘strange rubbish’ of this society may be considered expendable, but like things that go into a lost corner cupboard they are precious to the original owners” (86-87). Certainly, the clones who donate their vital organs remains precious as indicated by Sim, become really precious for the recipients that even if they die during or after donating their organs remain fresh in recipients who borrow it thus the homeless clones restrain as a precious being in the society.

However, the children leave Hailsham for the cottages when they reach adolescence before they started their training as carers, they undergo a number of donations until they cannot physically donate any more organs and they thus become “a complete,” (273) a euphemism used to denote clone’s death. Eight students ended up in the cottages other went to the White Mansion in the Welsh hills or to Polar Farm in Dorset. The cottages were the remains of a farm converted for them to live in. There were no guardians to receive them or to mingle with them. Only person, as a sort of guardian is Keffer, “a grumpy old guy” (114). The students find it difficult to cope with the new atmosphere without any guardian to guide them. They were said repeatedly by the guardians at Hailsham that after Hailsham there would be no guardians. So they have to take care of each other and in that case Hailsham had done its role well. Leaving their real home, they spend their first weeks by awkwardly standing outside the farmhouse without knowing what else to do. Ultimately, the children of Hailsham really miss their home and struggles to adjust to the new life in the cottages because “somewhere underneath, a part of us [clones] stayed like that: fearful of the world around us” (118). Nevertheless, Ishiguro’s novels are very rooted in a particular house or a particular place, they “re-enact the struggles between the individual and the collective, the vision of home and the sense of homelessness, with settings that literally house” (Lewis 5) the crucial theme.

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