

Never let me go and
the effects of
confined institutions
on humanity
argumentativ...

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People, particularly young people, are often inextricably affected by their experiences in confined institutions, such as British boarding schools. In the search for one's sense of identity, as well as the skills they need for the rest of their lives, the social and educational experiences gleaned in these institutions are thought to be heartless, cruel and confining, permitting only a limited perspective on life as opposed to the freedom of interacting with the outside world, and the strict bureaucracy of the faculty and staff. Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* demonstrates a science-fiction spin on the institution of the British boarding school system, noting the lack of humanity exhibited towards (and skewed expectations placed on) schoolchildren and taking it to an extreme. The inhabitants of the Hailsham boarding school, in mixing friendliness with cruelty and deliberately confining the experiences of the students, illustrate the restrictive and stifling nature of these institutions.

The boarding school system in England, as portrayed by the fictional Hailsham school, is shown to be dehumanizing. The children's sense of autonomy is extremely restricted; their behavior and movements are confined mostly to the grounds, with the exception of certain trips. The use of the creative arts as the primary means of education in Hailsham is an extension of the limited illusion of individuality boarding schools are said to provide. The overall effect of this curriculum is tranquilizing, as the children do not learn life skills, but are meant to feel fulfilled through the creation of art: " We took away your art because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to prove you had souls at all" (Ishiguro 238). This is presented as a progressive action, but it merely perpetuates a constant wanting in the characters, especially Tommy, whose work never

makes it to the " Gallery." Therefore, even the attempts to cultivate individuality in these institutions also breeds resentment and a sense of helplessness. This creates an increasingly insular subculture that remains isolated fairly strictly to those who attend the school; " a part of us stayed like that: fearful of the world around us, and-no matter how much we despised ourselves for it-unable quite to let each other go" (Ishiguro 109).

The reveal of the children as clones lends an added bit of subtext to the boarding school analogue; these children are meant to be just like their 'originals' (the previous generation, parents, role models, etc.), but are ultimately meant to serve them by offering their organs. In essence, the individuals of Hailsham are tempted by the possibility of replacing their 'originals,' meeting them, or even just interacting alongside them. They wish to know what it feels like in the outside world, contributing to this stifling feeling: " maybe from as early as when you're five or six, there's been a whisper going at the back of your head, saying: 'One day, maybe not so long from now, you'll get to know how it feels'" (Ishugiro 33).

The result of this metaphor is the perpetuation of inexplicably cruel attitudes of the teachers toward the children, interspersed within an overall attitude of geniality and helpfulness. While the teachers create an attitude of positivity and happiness around Hailsham, Miss Lucy, for example, shoots down the students' ability to succeed: " If you're going to have decent lives, then you've got to know and know properly your lives are set out for you" (Ishiguro 81). This demonstrates that, even with the establishment of clear social rules and benevolence, people can still behave cruelly towards each other. Miss

Lucy's comment also features the inherent failings of the boarding school system; they can never truly follow their own paths, only the paths that they are offered as part of where they live. This is similar to most boarding schools, which feature a very specific set of skills and training for their students, and are meant to be their own communities in and of themselves. They are insular for a reason - to keep out attitudes that can be dangerous to perpetuate in a population that might not be prepared for it. This is why the inhabitants of Hailsham have only a limited capacity to leave the grounds; they are ill-equipped, intentionally so, to not be able to handle what is out there.

Ishiguro's commentary on confined institutions does not extend solely to Hailsham and boarding schools; two-person patient/caretaker relationships are explored as well. Kathy's role as a " carer" is the purest evidence of this commentary on cruelty and proximity; the book's treatment of caring comments directly on " the commitment to proximity that makes caring seem a natural standard by which failures can be judged" (Robbins 290). Kathy cares greatly about her career as a carer - not just to stave off her own " completion," but to be a good carer in general.

The eventual reveal that Hailsham was actually a progressive school, wherein the work of the teachers was meant to show that clones have souls, notes the school's status in both the world of the novel and the novel itself as a way to counteract the restrictive situations normal boarding schools are in. Even in this progressive environment, the existing cruelties experienced in the school show that there is a long way to go before true freedom and

permission of expression is allowed towards boarding school students. As Tsitas (2006) argues, " here amongst the green fields and hockey lessons the children learn of their role in society," but the author notes very accurately that the overall purpose of these children is independent of their skills (257). The boarding school is seemingly a way to pass the time (and passively advocate for clones' rights and welfare) until their physical purpose is completed.

In conclusion, the banality and cruelty exhibited toward the characters of the Hailsham boarding school in *Never Let Me Go* is an extension of the cruelty of boarding schools in England, as well as the psychological effects of other such strictly hierarchical institutions. The confined nature of these places has a dehumanizing effect on these individuals, as they are groomed for very specific purposes and kept emotionally and romantically apart. The result is a careless world that sets people on distinct paths without the means to escape their fates; " your life must now run the course that's been set for it" (Ishiguro 243). In the novel, the connection to institutions like education facilities and medical-patient practice is shown to be restrictive, and perpetuates nihilistic attitudes about one's ability to be upwardly mobile.

Works Cited

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