

The symbolism of hailsham



**ASSIGN
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Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* allows for glimpses into some hidden dimension of a dystopian reality through the eyes of the protagonists' life; Kathy H. The anecdotal, narrative form of the novel permits Ishiguro to present the protagonists' memories and recollections of a lost time at her 'boarding school', Hailsham. As each memory from her childhood is relentlessly transcribed, an ever-emerging seed of doubt and trauma emerges amid the pleasantly habitual images. For Kathy, Hailsham was more than a home and school that she grew up in, but through Ishiguro's complex choice of language, structure and form, it became everything and virtually the only thing, that her character could believe and entrust.

The informality and casualness of Kathy's tone and character is what makes the plot climax so very understated. The conscious ignorance and innocence of all the children at Hailsham, particularly Kathy, is one of the major representations of what Hailsham comes to represent for her. The enigmatic surface of the novel is highlighted at the start of the narration; 'My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years.' The deceptive normality portrays confidence and self-awareness in Kathy, which displays a false sense of security. Moreover, the importance of her occupation as a 'carer' symbolizes to some extent how Kathy's identity and existence is very pragmatic, as this is one of the first images she wishes to offer the reader. Kathy's nonchalance leads the reader to believe her character is at peace with what society has planned for her body and vital organs. *Never Let Me Go* raises the debatable topic of whether ignorance is either beauty or evil, and to what extent knowledge becomes power. Kathy's character entrusts everything she knows in Hailsham, and most importantly

in the 'parent-like' figures of the 'Guardians'. The theme of innocence is evident within the suggestion that the students lack of a parental figure. Parents provide essential life-skills, which is some explanation as to why the pupils are so readily indoctrinated by the Guardians, such as Miss Emily.

Hailsham represents Kathy's passiveness, closely related to her readiness to conform to whatever society has planned for her existence. Kathy may describe her world through a very limited perspective, hence her ignorance, although within these perceptions, she exhibits astonishing powers of observation and interpretation. The simplicity in tone of the narrator only adds to one's growing horror and outrage at the characters' 'situation'. Kathy appears undisturbed by how her life has been predetermined, and simply accepts it as 'what we're supposed to be doing'. The essence and limits of humanity are constantly addressed in Ishiguro's novel, and there arises the question of what it is to be human. Choice, love and hope are to some extent the three most important things in life, the children of Hailsham are denied, which is interrelated to the human need of parental support. At the close of the novel, the quotation 'that'll be something no one can take away', suggests that Kathy is in fact human, and possesses undeniably human traits. Her character has simply been oppressed by the dehumanizing system in which they are forced to live.

Never Let Me Go is placed into the genre of dystopian narratives, and by which dehumanized creations meekly accept their fate. Although the character of Miss Emily reminds the reader with the idea that Hailsham was meant to be a 'humane' method for rearing the clones; a truly paradoxical and oxymoronic phenomenon. Although at the termination of the novel,

Hailsham wishes to prove that as a specie, the clones are ‘ as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human’.

For the manufactured beings at Hailsham, their ‘ home’ is their haven.

Despite the fear that the young students are indoctrinated, and are as some would comment ‘ kept like cattle awaiting slaughter’, Kathy’s life is

Hailsham. Memories before Hailsham are non-existent, and after Hailsham, the boarding school remains the foundations of her existence. Kathy’s life at

Hailsham was content, content with her relationship with Ruth; exclaiming she was ‘ most definitely in her good books. And that was more or less the way things stayed’.

Similarly, Kathy’s relationship with Tommy seemed to ‘ work out’ at school, though, once the security of Hailsham had been

removed, her relationship with Tommy, would no longer resolve. Hailsham was a sanctuary to its inhabitants, but meanwhile also a mystery. Despite

several suggestions of being forced to stay within the confinement of the school walls at Hailsham, nobody tries to escape, even after discovering their

future fates. Later in life too, Ishiguro never presents a carer to even

consider trying to save a donor. Rumors and denial are the two things that keep the students from attempting ‘ escape’; exemplified in one menacing

story concerning a girl being prevented from re-entering Hailsham after she ran away. Similarly, Ishiguro presents the children’s fear of leaving their

home, with the suggestion of an ‘ electric fence’ surrounding the school; ‘ It’s just as well the fences at Hailsham aren’t electrified. You get terrible

accidents sometimes.’ Alternatively, constant fear could be the reasoning as to why students remain at Hailsham, opposed to them believing it is a

sacred; ‘ Hail’ sanctuary.

For Kathy, society may be able to take away her vital organs, and eventually her life. However her connection with Hailsham is timeless and eternal; ‘That’ll be something no-one can take away’. Ishiguro empowers Kathy in the final chapter, her tone is defiant meanwhile tolerant of yielding her fate. A sense of ‘completion’ and acceptance is understood. The exclamation of a ‘quieter life’, is the suggestion of silence through her death, though conceivably the silence is a comfort away from the stress and emotion that she felt toward Tommy. Memories of Hailsham is all Kathy needs, whether it be through her audacity or ignorance, she is contently prepared to ‘complete’ her journey. Ishiguro presents Kathy’s character as both a submissive, ill-informed emulation, however at the close of the novel, she personifies the moral question of what it is to be human, and how the importance of challenging society through the art of questioning, can save a life. Kathy is both the victim and the victor at the conclusion of the work of fiction, and her readiness to ‘complete’ provides evidence of this.