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**The Genre of Literary Dystopia in  
Contemporary British Fiction  
(Kazuo Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go)**

Žánr literární dystopie v  
současné anglické literatuře  
(Kazuo Ishiguro, Neopouštěj mě)

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Lukáš Wild

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## **Abstract**

The main aim of this thesis is to analyse and compare two novels belonging to the literary genre of dystopia – *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. The emphasis is especially put on the topics that are common for both novels, such as cloning or the inevitability of fate. In addition, the thesis defines the terms utopia and dystopia, briefly introduces the authors of both analysed novels and also compares their narrative perspectives.

## **Anotace**

Hlavním cílem této práce je analyzovat a porovnat dva romány patřící do literárního žánru dystopie – *Neopouštěj mě* od Kazuo Ishigura a *Konec civilizace* od Aldouse Huxleyho. Důraz je kladen především na témata společná oběma románům, jako jsou například klonování a nevyhnutelnost osudu. Kromě toho práce definuje pojmy utopie a dystopie, stručně představuje autory obou analyzovaných románů a také porovnává jejich vyprávěcí perspektivy.

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## Introduction

This thesis is for the most part concerned with the individual subgenre of science fiction literature called dystopia. More specifically, with the novel representing this genre in British literature - *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro. Additionally, the dystopian fiction classic *Brave New World*, written in 1932 by Aldous Huxley, is used mainly as a contrast to Ishiguro's more recent novel.

After a brief introduction of contemporary science fiction authors in Anglo-American literature, it will be established what dystopia is and how it came to be as a literary genre. The thesis will then present both above mentioned authors and gradually summarise and, more importantly, analyse the two key novels. Subsequently, those topics that are common for both novels will be further compared and examined. Finally, the narrative perspectives present in the novels will be evaluated.

In dystopian literature, and science fiction in general, even the novels written decades ago sometimes become more relevant as time passes. This is due to constant technological advancement that could soon transform our society. That is also the case of *Brave New World*, which is thanks to its relevance still popular and well-known. Its author Aldous Huxley is often mentioned for his predictions of future, some of which are also concluded in this thesis.

With this considered, perhaps Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*, which deals primarily with the topic of human cloning and the issues that come with it, will soon become shockingly relevant and present even more topics to deal with. All the same, its controversial themes and important questions that are analysed in this thesis will stay pertinent perhaps for ever, even if human clones shall never be exploited.

Literary genres evolve with time and the same of course applies to dystopian fiction. It is therefore worthwhile to analyse it with the emphasis on its development. The two novels that are analysed and compared were written

more than seventy years apart from each other. Naturally, the context of contemporary society is much different to the one that existed decades ago. On top of that, both authors are using diverse literary techniques. It is thus intriguing to discover that a few topics are present in both of them. These topics are the main focus of later chapters of this thesis.

## 1. Science fiction in contemporary Anglo-American literature

In general, contemporary science fiction is a very popular genre that spans across many media types and art forms. Science fiction literature itself is then more complex than ever before:

*Not only do these great contemporary novels address technological and scientific future possibilities, they also envision intricate and fascinating future societies and civilizations and innumerable psychological transformations in humanity. They are filled with philosophical, ethical, and religious themes...*

*(Contemporary Futurist Thought 2006, p.80)*

Amongst the lately most popular authors of Anglo-American science fiction literature are for example a recently deceased Ian M. Banks (*The Culture* series, *The Algebraist*), M. John Harrison (*Climbers*, *Nova Swing*), Christopher Priest (*Inverted World*, *The Prestige*), David Mitchel (*number9dream*, *Cloud Atlas*) or China Miéville (*King Rat*, *Perdido Street Station*), who is with his “weird fiction” possibly the most distinguishable figure amongst these writers.

However, very commercially successful authors that feature elements of science fiction in their works are also Suzanne Collins (*The Hunger Games* trilogy) and Veronica Roth (*Divergent* trilogy), whose dystopian novels targeted primarily at young adult readers are being sold by millions every year. Thanks to their success, dystopia and science fiction in general are quite surprisingly one of the most popular literary genres amongst teenage readers.



## 2. Utopia and Dystopia in literature

The term utopia, as it is perceived today, means something ideal or perfect and, most importantly, non-existent. It has been traditionally used to describe imaginary places or worlds where social justice and other positive society states were achieved. These places are usually depicted to be similar to our western society, but are more advanced and life in them is simply better.

The expression *utopia* comes from Greek and literary means “not-place”. The first utopian novel ever written is considered to be Plato’s *Republic*. However, the word itself was first used in the novel *Utopia* written by Thomas More in 1551. In this famous book, the author portrayed a model society where things like poverty or injustice simply do not exist. It is an ideal society based on equality, as well as political and economic prosperity.

It is important to stress that in utopian fiction, in terms of creating a better world, scientific progress and technological advance in general plays a major role. This, along with a view on politics, is where dystopia emerged as the counterpart to utopia. In the eyes of its authors, this progress is viewed as anything but positive. In dystopia, scientific discoveries are used by politics not to help their people like in utopia, but to control them. Both, politics and modern technology are therefore perceived as possible danger to mankind.

*“Dystopian literature creates a fantastical world which is the antithesis of an idealised utopia...”<sup>1</sup>* It also depicts fictional societies as utopia, but it shows them as a very bad place to live as an average citizen. The main problems in such societies are poverty, lack of freedom or human misery. These troubles are often caused by political oppression and dictatorship. Therefore, dystopia is generally used to point out the danger of authoritarian regimes. It often shares characteristics with science fiction, because dystopian authors

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<sup>1</sup> BICKLEY 2008, p. 45

usually describe near future and often use elements typical of this genre, such as time travel or advanced technologies.

The term dystopia is thought to be first used by John Stuart Mill, specifically in his parliament speech in 1868. Dystopian literature itself became famous around the time of World War II, notably thanks to the literary works of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. Nowadays, dystopian motives can be found in many popular fiction books and films.

### 3. Aldous Huxley

*Mention Aldous Huxley to the average reader and if he remembers him at all, he will probably say, "Oh yes, didn't he write Brave New World?" Occasionally, his name will appear in news stories in connection with his predictions made in that dystopian novel or his experiments with psychedelic drugs. It is unlikely that he will be recalled for much else.*

*(Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Aldous Huxley 2011, p.3)*

Aldous Leonard Huxley was born on July 26, 1894 in England, into the famous Huxley family. His grandfather Thomas Henry Huxley, brother Julian Huxley and half-brother Andrew Huxley all became respected biologists. Aldous himself also intended to follow an example set by his grandfather and wanted to become a doctor and scientist. He attended the Hillside School in his hometown Godalming and later entered Eton College. However, in 1910, after just two years of study, he was forced to leave due to his serious eye disease that left him temporarily blind.

In 1913, after partially regaining his sight, Huxley entered Balliol College, Oxford and studied literature there. Around 1915 he became associated with a circle of writers and intellectuals known as the Bloomsbury circle, which included figures like T.S. Eliot, Bertrand Russell or Osbert Sitwell.

During his studies at Oxford he also met D.H. Lawrence, with whom he later became close friends. Around this time, after being rejected by the army because of his eyesight problems, Huxley turned to writing. He started to write poems, of which the three collections appeared during the 1910s.

Following his graduation in 1916, Huxley began teaching at Eton College (one of his students there was Eric Blair, later to become famous under the pseudonym George Orwell). After not succeeding in this role, he decided to start a career as a journalist and moved to London. He did so already with his wife, Maria, whom he married in 1919 and had his only child with a year later.

Huxley published his first novel, *Crome Yellow*, in 1921. During 1920s, he travelled around Europe with his family and wrote several novels, short stories and essays. In 1930, his close friend D.H. Lawrence died after a long illness, and Huxley moved to a small house in southern France. It was there, where he wrote dystopian novel *Brave New World*. It is undoubtedly especially this novel that he is being remembered for. Despite the mixed reviews from critics at the time of its publishing, *Brave New World* later became by far his most famous work.

In the pre-war years Huxley moved to United States and became an open pacifist. In that time, he also started to be interested in mysticism and eastern cultures. During the World War II, he worked as a screenwriter in Hollywood. In the 1950s, after contracting another serious eye disease, he began experimenting with LSD and other hallucinogenic drugs. In addition to many essays and poetry, Aldous Huxley published during his life fifteen novels in total. He still actively wrote until his death of cancer on November 22, 1963.

## 4. Brave New World

Along with Orwell's *1984*, *Brave New World* is nowadays being regarded as the most recognizable and iconic dystopian book. In the context of this thesis it is important to note that this classical dystopian novel will serve mainly as a contrast to Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*.

One of the reasons why *Brave New World* is still very popular amongst the readers is the fact that technological advance make it even more relevant as time passes. However, despite its present status, the reviews at the time of its publishing were mixed. Some of them were even strongly negative:

*...critics accused Brave New World of being dry, boring, and overly simplistic [...] called the novel "a lugubrious and heavy-handed piece of propaganda." [...] Another complaint was Huxley's "preoccupation with sexuality."*

*(Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Aldous Huxley 2011, p.12)*

Regarding the sales, it was neither a failure nor a great accomplishment. The figure of 13,000 sold copies in the first year of its publishing in England was solid, but did not predict a long term success. It was even banned in many countries, including Australia or Ireland. However, years after its publishing the novel has become a highly praised dystopian work, from both critics and most of its readers.

### 4.1. Summary and analysis

*Brave New World* is set in a fictional dystopian society, which unites all the people into the one World State. The State's citizens willingly gave up democracy and personal freedom to live in a seemingly perfect social climate. However, everyone is born with a clear social role and cannot freely decide what to do with their lives. On top of that, everyone's positive state of mind is achieved mainly with the help of a sleep-teaching method during adolescence and with a usage of the psychotic drug called "Soma"

throughout adulthood. This drug is described as *“all the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects”*<sup>2</sup>.

The narration begins in the “Central London Hatching and Conditioning Centre” with the Director’s speech to the bunch of young students. He, his assistant Henry Foster and a vaccination worker Lenina Crowne present them (and the reader) the facility. The usage of complicated biological processes allows workers to produce artificially made human embryos. The facility itself resembles an assembly line and embryos created there are carefully conditioned to later become suitable citizens. They are divided into five classes - from Alpha to Epsilon. Each class (or caste) has its clear purpose and their members are conditioned accordingly. For instance, Alphas are intellectual leaders and most prominent citizens, while lower classes are destined to live humble lives and perform manual labour. Even their physical proportions are altered during the conditioning process so that, for example, adult Alphas are taller and more physically attractive than other classes.

All these changes are accomplished by giving embryos of the lower classes various substances to negatively alter their development. With the exception of future Alphas and Betas, all the other classes are being cloned. The facility can therefore produce up to a hundred embryos from a single human egg – creating up to one hundred identical twins:

*“Ninety-six identical twins working ninety-six identical machines!” The voice was almost tremulous with enthusiasm. “You really know where you are. For the first time in history.” He quoted the planetary motto. “Community, Identity, Stability.”*

*(Brave New World 1982, p. 7)*

The process of cloning and conditioning is described very thoroughly by the author. This suggests that the technological aspect of the dystopian society is very important in the novel. It is interesting that with the ability to produce

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<sup>2</sup> Huxley 1982, p. 37

endless numbers of perfectly healthy and intellectually gifted humans, leaders of the World State deliberately choose to damage embryos with oxygen deprivation to downgrade their capabilities and appearance. That way the society is varied enough and suits the needs of the World State.

In the other part of the facility, called the Nursery, young children are “programmed” to like certain things and dislike others. The Director, while observing infant Deltas being taught to dislike books, explains that this method ensures that the specific classes will behave in a way they are supposed to. Moreover, to ensure that all children will later embrace the role of the happy and law abiding citizens, they are being taught the morals of the World State with sleep-teaching method. With this method, they also teach them to embrace their role in the society and to be content with their already planned out lives.

Outside the facility, where large number of children openly play sexual games, one of the ten World Controllers, Mustapha Mond, explains the history of the World State and its society. The reader learns that the citizens of this state are now completely freed from any negative emotions. Everyone is also encouraged to use psychotic drugs and take part in many shallow part-time activities, like “*Ford’s Day celebrations, and Community Sings*”<sup>3</sup>. And while sexuality is more open than ever before, all serious human relationships or family structures are non-existent:

*Our Ford-or Our Freud, as, for some inscrutable reason, he chose to call himself whenever he spoke of psychological matters-Our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life. The world was full of fathers-was therefore full of misery; full of mothers-therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts-full of madness and suicide.*

*(Brave New World 1982, p. 28)*

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<sup>3</sup> Huxley 1982, p. 37

This section taken from the novel also illustrates how Huxley often tried to show the dangers of totalitarian societies. With the firm control over every part of the state, even history can be rewritten. This is illustrated here on the example of attributing Freud's ideas to Ford (the creator of an assembly line). In the World State's society, all religion was abolished and the word "God" has been replaced by "Ford", who serves as the central figure of the World State's ideology. On top of that, every citizen has to attend weekly orgies celebrating Ford's name.

This is one of the reasons why the novel is sometimes classified as the "*bourgeois dystopia*"<sup>4</sup>. This term originates from the fact that Huxley used some elements of capitalism to show how they could possibly serve as the tools for oppression. Some ideas of these capitalistic elements, for example "Ford" replacing "God", are so extended in the novel that they nowadays seem quite far-fetched.

The narration then focuses on Bernard, an Alpha-Plus psychologist. "*Bernard Marx is an example of unsuccessful, or incomplete, conditioning.*"<sup>5</sup> Not only that he is unusually short for an Alpha Plus, unlike his fellow citizens he also often feels angry, depressed or even jealous. This is in part caused by the fact that he does not take the drug Soma, so he is not as "relaxed" as others. Another aspect of his personality that makes him stand out is his critical approach towards society as a whole - Bernard does not approve of promiscuity and other shallow activities, which are so typical in the life-style of the World State's citizens. It is also the lack of individualism that bothers him. Other citizens' view on Bernard's behaviour is clear from this conversation between Lenina and her friend Fanny:

*"But his reputation?"*

*"What do I care about his reputation?"*

*"They say he doesn't like Obstacle Golf."*

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<sup>4</sup> Booker 1994, p. 48

<sup>5</sup> Bloom 2011, p. 17



*"They say, they say," mocked Lenina.*

*"And then he spends most of his time by himself-alone." There was horror in Fanny's voice.*

*(Brave New World 1982, p. 34)*

To some degree, he could be viewed as a "voice of reason" at the beginning of the novel. Moreover, his critical thinking and constant irritation with the World State's ideology make him the right person for the reader to identify with. Another unusually dissatisfied citizen is Bernard's friend Helmholtz Watson, who feels that his job is unfulfilling and is annoyed with most of the World State's practices.

Bernard plans to make a trip to the so called "Savage Reservation", and decides to invite Lenina Crowne, an attractive young Beta, who is basically the prototype of a content and obedient citizen. She feels strangely attracted to Bernard and therefore chooses to accept his invitation. Bernard later asks his superior, the Director of Central Hatchery, for permission to travel to the Savage Reservation. Before giving the permission, the Director talks about his own trip there that occurred many years before. He tells Bernard that he had been forced to depart without his female companion - she was lost during a huge storm and as a consequence left behind in the Reservation.

The Savage Reservation represents a crucial point in the novel. The lifestyle of people living there could be compared to the way of life of some traditional African tribes. Perhaps not surprisingly, citizens of the World State view them as primitives. All in all, the Reservation clearly serves as a certain counterpart to the World State and its dependability on technology. The clash of the two cultures is eminent as soon as Bernard and Lenina arrive to the Reservation.

Shortly before landing, Bernard learns via a phone call from his friend Helmholtz that the Director is planning to get rid of Bernard. The Director's reasoning behind this decision is later revealed as: *"Unorthodoxy threatens*

*more than the life of a mere individual; it strikes at Society itself. Yes, at Society itself.*“ So, due to Bernard’s “threatening unorthodoxy”, he plans to get rid of him by sending him to Iceland. Although shocked and irritated, Bernard decides to continue with his trip. In the Savage Reservation, Lenina and Bernard observe the strangeness of “savages”. For example, Lenina is shocked to see that some of the “savages” look old – people in the World State look young even in their sixties (this is due to complicated medical procedures) and then die before ever looking old. Another shock for her is observing some religious ritual that includes a young man’s whipping. All this makes Lenina disgusted and eager to leave as soon as possible.

However, in a little while after their arrival they meet with a young man named John. He explains that his mother, called Linda, comes from the “Other Place” – the other part of the world. He explains that she was abandoned by John’s father, who returned to the “Other Place” without her. Already pregnant Linda was then rescued by local people, gave birth to her son (“*of course there wasn’t anything like an Abortion Centre here*”<sup>6</sup>) and has lived in the Reservation ever since. However, her behaviour (for example, she had sex with every men in the village) then caused John’s difficult childhood and is also a reason why he became a social outcast. He knows about the other, “civilized” world only from the stories told to him by his mother. John also tells them that he learned to read from his mother and has read the book about conditioning of embryos, which she gave him. However, his favourite is the second book he managed to obtain – *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*.

Given the details about John’s origin, Bernard immediately recognizes that John’s mother Linda is the same woman that the Director abandoned years ago in the Reservation. To John’s delight, Bernard decides to bring John back with him and Lenina to London. On top of that, he also agrees to bring along John’s mother Linda. This plot twist based on a rather random encounter

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<sup>6</sup> Huxley 1982, p. 81

might seem a bit trivial from the present day perspective. After all, *Brave New World* has never been much prized for its plot devices by the critics, or the readers for that matter. It is the shocking and yet worryingly accurate predictions that are nowadays the most crucial point of this novel. Be that as it may, this random encounter in the Savage Reservation certainly introduces an important element to the novel's plot – John's lack of identity and a failure to fit into any of the two different societies (he essentially remains a social outcast his whole life).

After his return to London, Bernard is immediately summoned by the Director, who plans to make an example of him and exile him in front of the crowd of high-caste workers. However, Bernard introduces Linda and John in front of everyone, which not only devastates the Director (who resigns, leaving Bernard free to stay in London) but the absurdity of it also makes everyone else laugh. Especially John's theatrical entrance – he entered the room saying "*My father!*"<sup>7</sup> and kneeled before the Director – generates quite a havoc amongst the onlookers, who are amused by the absurdity of someone's paternity. "*After the scene in the Fertilizing Room, all upper-caste London was wild to see this delicious creature...*"<sup>8</sup> Thus John, nicknamed as "The Savage", became a sensation within the World State right after his arrival.

At first, John is eager to see the "Other Place", as he calls the World State. This is of course not surprising given the fact that his mother was telling him about it with much enthusiasm ever since he was a child. However, after the encounter with the World State's moral principles and everyday practices, such as dividing clones into the different casts or open sexuality, he soon finds himself uneasy and on the edge of society again. To make things worse, he is attracted to Lenina but at the same time is also shocked by her open manners and the lack of morality.

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<sup>7</sup> Huxley 1982, p. 102

<sup>8</sup> Huxley 1982, p. 103

As the “Savage’s guardian”, Bernard also becomes popular. With John’s moral dilemmas and struggle to find sense in the world, Bernard on the other hand embraces the opportunity of being famous and, uncharacteristically to his earlier moral stances, uses it to his advantage with women. With this development, Huxley is perhaps suggesting that fame can change even the most rational person.

Bernard later introduces John to his friend Helmholtz Watson, who also enjoys reading Shakespeare. John is delighted to meet someone sharing his passion and the two often read to each other. However, one time during John’s reading of *Romeo and Juliet* Helmholtz starts hysterically laughing because he finds the concept of a suicide induced by love ridiculous. This offends John, who romanticizes his relationship with Lenina at the time, and he loses any hope he had left for the people in the World State to understand him. Shortly after, he expresses his love to Lenina. However, her lack of understanding of his ideas about romance lead him to refuse her direct proposal to have sex.

John’s mother Linda then unexpectedly dies, which leads to John’s outburst boosted by his observation of child-like Delta workers (they are intellectually at the level of a ten-year-old child) peacefully obeying their orders. John tries to start a riot with the statements like: “*Don’t you want to be free and men? Don’t you even understand what manhood and freedom are?*”<sup>9</sup>. Upon hearing the news about this, Bernard and Helmholtz come to John’s assistance and try to calm the situation down. But it is too late, and after the revolt is stopped by the police all three of them are arrested and brought to the office of one of the ten World Controllers - Mustapha Mond.

Here, in Mustapha Mond’s study room, the plot climaxes. During the debate about society in general and the World State’s principles, John tries to argue that things like art or personal freedom are positive elements and should not be oppressed. However, Mond easily dismisses every argument John makes

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<sup>9</sup> Huxley 1982, p. 146

with his reasoning that the general happiness and social stability are more important than moral principles or any kind of freedom.

As a consequence of their actions and stances, Bernard and Helmholtz are exiled to the Falkland Islands and sentenced to live there for the rest of their lives. And while Helmholtz embraces it as an opportunity to read and write freely, Bernard collapses with horror and has to be carried out of the room. John then argues with Mond about religious freedom and other philosophical viewpoints, mainly using quotes from Shakespeare.

John argues that individuality and life choices are crucial and even the danger is a necessary part of everyday life. And while Mond agrees with some of his ideas, he stresses out that the citizens of the World State are happy and that everything is for their own good. So, as an American literary critic Harold Bloom states in his guide to the novel: *“There is no further argument; the savage and the Controller understand each other, but ultimately they disagree at the heart of the issue.”*<sup>10</sup>

After all this is over, Bernard, Helmholtz and John reconcile with each other. John tells them that he had unsuccessfully asked the World Controller to be sent to the Falkland Islands with them. John then states that he refuses to take part in any “experiment” (that is how Mond himself called John’s stay in London) and wants to be left alone.

After his departure from London, John tries to find his peace in an old abandoned lighthouse. He tries to “purify” his soul by whipping himself, which draws the attention of some sensation seeking journalists, who are amused by his desperate actions. Lenina, along with many curious onlookers and journalist, also seeks out John and offers him herself again. John then submits to the general mood induced by the drug Soma and takes part in a

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<sup>10</sup> Bloom 2011 p. 65

religious orgy. At the closing lines of the novel, the reader learns that John hanged himself out of desperation after regretting his previous actions:

*"Mr. Savage!"*

*Slowly, very slowly, like two unhurried compass needles, the feet turned towards the right; north, north-east, east, south-east, south, south-south-west; then paused, and, after a few seconds, turned as unhurriedly back towards the left. South-south-west, south, southeast, east. ...*

*(Brave New World 1982, p. 229)*

## **4.2. Conclusion**

Huxley's aim to draw attention to possibly dangerous path that Western civilization took stands out especially when compared to reality decades after *Brave New World* was first published. As the author Neil Postman put it in one of his theoretical literary works, it is interesting to think about Huxley's predictions from the contemporary perspective (he puts them in comparison to the most famous dystopian novel *1984*, written by George Orwell):

*Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. [...] Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance.*

*(Amusing Ourselves to Death 1985, p.xix)*

This fact alone is the main reason why this classical dystopian novel still remains popular amongst many readers and literary critics. More than eighty years since the publishing of his famous novel, the author's foresight proves to be the most important and mention worthy feature of *Brave New World*. So, how much did Huxley really get right? With the genetic engineering still not as developed as it is depicted in the novel, perhaps it is up to the future generations to answer this question. However, even today it is already possible to see some hints that Huxley's dark vision might not be as far-

fetched as it would seem just several decades ago. With the extreme consumerism or growing individualism, maybe it could be only a matter of time before some new totalitarian regimes spawn across European civilization. Moreover, the rise of the Internet also shows that having too much information available only a “click” away can indeed lead some people to passivity.

All things considered, it is interesting to note that some of the novel’s topics not only stay relevant throughout the time, but they become even more significant with the progressive changes in Western society. In the context of this thesis, it is also important to note that Huxley’s detailed and straightforward depiction of the novel’s characters and the plot itself is the example of one of the many possible approaches to narration in science fiction literature. Another, very different and rather subtle way of narration is presented with the example of *Never Let Me Go* by a British author of Japanese origin Kazuo Ishiguro.

## 5. Kazuo Ishiguro

*In a century of British prose fiction heralded and shaped by such transplanted authors as the Polish Joseph Conrad and the American Henry James, it nevertheless may come as a surprise that Kazuo Ishiguro, a Japanese-born writer, now ranks among England's most distinguished contemporary novelists.*

*(Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro 1998, p.12)*

Kazuo Ishiguro was born on November 8, 1954, in Nagasaki, Japan. His father Shizuo was a physical oceanographer and it was his work that brought the whole family to England in 1960. Concerning his cultural background, Ishiguro identifies himself as an international author: *“And so I had no clear role, no society or country to speak for or write about [...] this did push me necessarily into trying to write in an international way.”*<sup>11</sup>

Regarding his education, Ishiguro attended a grammar school for boys in Surrey, before entering the University of Kent. He then studied the postgraduate course of Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. Amongst his tutors there were Malcolm Bradbury and Angela Carter, who both influenced his writing.

Ishiguro began his career writing short stories. The breakthrough year in his life and work was certainly 1982, when he became a British citizen and also published his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*. The novel, concerning the story of a Japanese woman Etsuko living in England, also exploits the destruction of Nagasaki. It was very well received by critics and readers alike. A year later, it was even awarded the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize for the best regional novel of the year.

His second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), centres on Hasuji Ono, old Japanese painter who feels regrets about his previous war-time

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<sup>11</sup> Shaffer, Wong 2008, p. 58



activities. It was again a great success – the novel was awarded with the Whitbread Book of the Year Award and also shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Ishiguro later recalled his positive feelings about being shortlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize as follows: “... [I was] completely thrilled to be at the ceremony. [...] For an author who has yet to find a wide audience, a shortlisting will have a big impact, both in the short and long term.”<sup>12</sup> The year 1986 meant also a success in his personal life - he married a social worker Lorna Anne MacDougall. They have a daughter Naomi together.

Following the two novels with the Japanese protagonists, *The Remains of the Day* (1989), his third novel, tells mainly the story of an English butler Mr. Stevens. During the narrative, it is him who recalls his earlier professional experience and tries to understand it better. The novel received delighted reviews and was awarded the Booker Prize. It was produced as a film starring Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson four years after its publishing. The film’s success even increased Ishiguro’s popularity.

It is interesting that all of his three early novels have the same time-setting. The plot is set either pre-World War Two, or relatively closely behind it. Ishiguro said about this:

*I chose these settings for a particular reason: they are potent for my themes. I tend to be attracted to pre-war and post-war settings because I’m interested in this business of values and ideals being tested, and people having to face up to the notion that their ideals weren’t quite what they thought they were before the test came.*

*(Kazuo Ishiguro by Graham Swift 1989)*

A certain change of author’s approach to the narrative came with his fourth novel, *The Unconsoled* (1995). This change is described by Brian W. Shaffer as: “...the elegant Jamesian prose of the earlier novels is replaced with a

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<sup>12</sup> <<http://www.themanbookerprize.com/latest/interview-kazuo-ishiguro>>

*disturbing Kafkaesque dreamscape*".<sup>13</sup> The novel is set in an unnamed central European city and is focusing on an English pianist Ryder. It brought Ishiguro yet another literary award, this time the Cheltenham Prize. In the same year, 1996, Ishiguro also received the Order of the British Empire for services to literature.

Next came *When We Were Orphans* (2000), the story of an English private detective, Christopher Banks, who is revealing the mystery of his parents' disappearance. It is set in Shanghai in the early part of the twentieth century. According to Ishiguro, this novel gave him "*more trouble than any other book*"<sup>14</sup>. It was due to the fact that the author's original concept, complicated mystery in the Agatha Christie way, did not work out the way he wanted. Despite this trouble, after its publishing it was critically praised and even shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction.

His following novel, the dystopian fiction *Never Let Me Go* (2005) set in an alternate world and narrated from first-person perspective of a human clone, was again shortlisted for Booker Prize. In addition, it was named the best novel of 2005 by Time magazine. This novel will be subjected to further analysis later in this thesis.

Finally, Ishiguro published his most recent novel, *The Buried Giant* (2015), ten years later. Despite its historical setting (the plot is set in southern England during the descent of the Roman Empire), it falls under a fantasy genre. It depicts a story of the two main protagonists, Axl and Beatrice, who are on the journey to find their son.

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<sup>13</sup> Shaffer 1998, p. 5

<sup>14</sup> <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5829/the-art-of-fiction-no-196-kazuo-ishiguro>>

## 6. Never Let Me Go

*In Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go (2005), the reader slowly becomes aware of a horrifying and entirely unimaginable perspective. Ishiguro delineates a world that appears almost banal in its familiarity: during a trip to Norwich the central characters mingle with the crowds in Woolworth's to look at tapes and cards. Yet they live with an unthinkable destiny: they must all donate vital organs until, ultimately, they "complete".*

*(Contemporary Fiction 2008, p.46)*

*Never Let Me Go* is Kazuo Ishiguro's first science fiction novel. It represents a literary subgenre called dystopia, because its narration takes place in an alternate society where, although everything seems to be perfect, many people greatly suffer. This is emphasised mainly by using a human clone, a young woman called Kathy (who is destined to die in her mid-thirties), as the first-person narrator. The sci-fi setting actually allowed Ishiguro to expand his original idea of "a story about students, young people who are going to go through a human life span in thirty years instead of eighty."<sup>15</sup> The decision to use human clones as the main protagonists also helped him to raise some serious and difficult questions about our very existence, such as (suggested by the author himself): "What does it mean to be a human being?"<sup>16</sup>

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the novel was a great success among literary critics. In addition to that, it also succeeded commercially and was subsequently produced as a film. Although the film, starring actress Kiera Knightley, did not become a big commercial success, it naturally helped to promote the novel itself. With all things considered, the novel marked yet another Ishiguro's literary success and only strengthened his already

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<sup>15</sup> < <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5829/the-art-of-fiction-no-196-kazuo-ishiguro>>

<sup>16</sup> < <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5829/the-art-of-fiction-no-196-kazuo-ishiguro>>

established position amongst the most recognizable contemporary British authors.

## **6.1. List of characters**

### **Kathy H.**

*“My name is Kathy H. I’m thirty-one years old, and I’ve been a carer now for over eleven years”*<sup>17</sup> states the opening sentence of the novel. Kathy is an intelligent and emotionally mature person, who has accepted her eventual fate peacefully. The term “carer” stands for a temporary profession, which means that she personally supports a few donors after giving their donations. Her occupation is to take care of their troubles or sustain their mental health. Usually, she just talks with them so they do not feel lonely and manages some minor matters for them, such as transfers to other facilities. She can be sure that she is good enough at her profession because she has a special privilege in choosing her own donors.

Kathy is the first-person narrator of the novel and from the beginning recalls some important moments of her life. The reader learns everything about the other characters through her eyes. It is her calm, precise narration that leads the reader through the shocking and mysterious story, consisting mostly of Kathy’s memories from when she was younger, and later on with some more recent events. It is almost halfway throughout the story when Kathy H. finally explicitly reveals in her narration that she, and all of her friends, are in fact human clones.

### **Tommy D.**

Kathy has known Tommy since they both attended Hailsham, the “private school” for cloned children. In his youth, Tommy used to undergo an uncontrolled outbursts of anger. It started when his childish looking drawing received compassionate praise from one of the kind guardians, and

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<sup>17</sup> Ishiguro 2005, p. 1

his classmates started to mock him over his lack of creativity. Nevertheless, his outbursts led to even more frequent mocking and subsequent inability to make friends. It was Kathy who used to be his only friend during that time. However, Tommy later managed to get his anger under control, and even formed a romantic relationship with one of Kathy's friends Ruth. Near the end of the novel, when Tommy already finished giving his first two donations, Kathy becomes his "carer" and lover.

### **Ruth**

Ruth and Kathy were very close friends during their time at Hailsham. Despite that, their bond has been challenged many times, especially by Ruth's unpredictable behaviour towards Kathy. Although their friendship fell apart altogether after Kathy left the Cottages to become a carer, Kathy later sought Ruth out and they had a chance to become friends again. At the final chapters Ruth tries to make up for her past mistakes, and persuades Kathy and Tommy to find Madame.

### **Madame Marie-Claude**

While being at Hailsham, Kathy and her friends had not known about Madame's role or profession. Once in a while, she randomly visited the school and took away the best students' artworks. The students thought that she collects their work for some sort of an art collection, and therefore felt motivated to continue with their production. Despite Madame's cold behaviour towards the students at Hailsham, the reader learns that she had actually tried to assure the best possible life for them. She had also tried to prevent Hailsham from closing, in which she failed. When Ruth encouraged them to try to find her, Madame ultimately represented the last hope for Kathy and Tommy.

### **Miss Emily**

As the head guardian at Hailsham, Miss Emily made all the decisions regarding the education of the students. She was also directly responsible for

the limited amount of information given to them about their future. Despite her strict manners, she clearly wanted to treat young clones in the same way as regular humans and reassure the best possible life for them. Therefore, in spite of her questionable methods, her good intentions cannot be denied.

### **Miss Lucy**

Recently hired guardian Miss Lucy feels that students should know more details about their future than the head guardian Miss Emily wants them to. She clearly struggles with Emily's instructions and from time to time shares her opinions with students. Finally, after overhearing some of them talking about their intentions to become actors when they grow up, she bursts out and explicitly tells them everything about their future. Following this incident, she is dismissed from Hailsham by Miss Emily.

## **6.2. Summary and analysis**

The plot is set in an alternate world where medicine uses human clones as organ donors. Even though the year in which the narration takes place is not mentioned by the author, the novel's setting clearly resembles the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It can be presumed that the society depicted in the novel is technologically very advanced in medical field, although it does not appear to be more progressed than our society in other aspects.

Undoubtedly, there are not many details in the plot concerning the society depicted in the novel. As a literary critic M John Harrison put it:

*Inevitably [...] this novel will be described as science fiction. But there's no science here. How are the clones kept alive once they've begun 'donating'? Who can afford this kind of medicine, [...]? Ishiguro's refusal to consider questions such as these forces his story into a pure rhetorical space.*

*(Contemporary Fiction 2008, p.113)*

This “*rhetorical space*” is no coincidence though, as it is evidently convenient for the author. Instead of dealing with the issues related to science, it allows Ishiguro to focus on those topics where his writing style typically flourishes. After all, he is famous for his rather reserved style of writing, not excessive descriptions. In any case, the science is perhaps indeed irrelevant in the novel such as *Never Let Me Go*, which is dealing with the themes like human mortality or inevitability of fate rather than the cloning itself. Therefore, without considering the matter deeply the topic of cloning could be viewed as nothing more than a tool, which makes the whole story more interesting and mysterious. However, the more detailed view on the novel suggests that this science fiction aspect also helps the author to reflect the current topics in our contemporary society. Moreover, with the current rate of scientific advancement the moral aspect of cloning could be the subject of daily debates perhaps sooner than many people realize.

The storyline essentially resolves around the three main characters: Kathy H., Tommy D. and Ruth. They had been lucky enough to be placed into an elite boarding school Hailsham, which was run by the responsible, teacher-like figures “guardians”. Kathy is used as the first-person narrator from whom the reader learns everything and never leaves her point of view. This means that the reader has a chance to identify with her, which allows the author to evoke the feelings of discomfort and despair, especially in the final chapters of the novel. In other words, Kathy’s narration feels very personal and although it is not directly emotional (Kathy is very rational and calm person) it is fairly easy to empathize with her. It is undoubtedly one of Ishiguro’s tools to draw the reader into the plot and make him feel involved.

All the young clones, including the novel’s main characters, are at first not fully aware of their origin, nor their inevitable fate. The same goes for the reader, who does not know for sure that the main characters are all clones until almost halfway through the novel. The author accomplishes this by never revealing too much. For example, until later in the novel he does not reveal the true nature of “donations”. Also, he uses the word “completed”

instead of its true meaning, which would be: “died after giving donations”. This permits Ishiguro to build up tension and keep the reader guessing.

To complete the feeling of uncertainty, Kathy’s first-person narration starts off without giving any specific details about the world that the main characters are living in. The narration is also occasionally non-chronological, and is divided into three parts. The first part mostly reflects Kathy’s childhood and starts quite mysteriously. The reader learns that her profession is called a “carer” and then about her growing up at the boarding-school called Hailsham, but do not know much more. The plot of the second chapter is set during her time at the place called Cottages, and finally the third one is set during Kathy’s years as a “carer”.

In her thirties, Kathy’s life mostly consists of traveling between various recovery centres and visiting donors after they have completed one of their donations. Most of the donors she has chosen also grew up in Hailsham, so talking with them often reminds her of her own childhood. Therefore, from the very beginning of the novel Kathy recollects her childhood memories, and the reader starts to discover how mystifying her life at Hailsham really was. For example, the fact that children at Hailsham cannot leave its premises and are constantly being told that they are “very special” certainly indicates some sort of a secrecy.

However, due to Kathy’s narrow narration it can be only presumed that the portrayed fictional world is not as perfect as it seems to be. Other mysteries, like the figure of Madame who is resentful in presence of the students and is also collecting their art works for unknown reasons, only add up to an already mystifying nature of the narration.

Kathy’s life at Hailsham is portrayed mostly through her bonds with Tommy and Ruth. For that reason, friendship itself plays an important role in the novel. While the relationship with Tommy could be summarised as a firm friendship, her connection with Ruth is constantly changing. At one point, they seem to be the best friends, only to have a terrible row just a few days



later. They are spending a lot of time trying to atone for their mishaps with mutual favours. Furthermore, their friendship becomes even more complicated when Tommy and Ruth start dating.

With the increasing number of pages, the reader is progressively led to realize that the children at Hailsham are not only “special”, as is said by the guardians, but their eventual destiny conceals a terrifying secret. The author structures his narration carefully and uses only occasional hints, which keeps the reader in suspense. Until finally, in the seventh chapter of the novel, the reader knows for sure what awaits the students when they grow up. Although they are privileged by growing up in an elite school, their sole purpose is to grow up and donate their organs to “regular” people in need of transplantation. This unavoidable fate is eventually revealed to the students by one of the guardians, Miss Lucy:

*Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do. [...] You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided.*

*(Never Let Me Go 2005, p. 76)*

However, the children have somehow always felt that their life may be holding such fate for them, and therefore were not as shocked by her words as could be expected. Nevertheless, Miss Lucy's speech can still be established as the defining moment when the innocent story of Kathy's life undeniably breaks into the terrifying dystopian tale. From this point onwards, the novel is subtly questioning human morale. However, the ideas are not explicitly written by the author and it therefore very much depends on the reader's willingness to acknowledge controversial themes. These are, for example, a human willingness to sacrifice others for our own benefit (in the novel the innocent clones), lack of concern for our lives or the inevitability of fate.

In the seventh chapter of the novel, Kathy states (without explain why) that the last years at Hailsham were quite different. This could originate from the fact that, despite Miss Emily's efforts, all students have very well known that their life after Hailsham will not only be very different, but also very difficult. In spite of that, it is interesting to notice that they do not revolt against their destiny in any way. Students just seem be to ready to fulfil their destiny, and peacefully accept their role in society. This could serve as the proof that Miss Emily's methods of not revealing any details to the clones are in fact effective, despite their questionable moral background.

Before she accidentally lost it, Kathy's most precious item throughout her childhood was a cassette tape with the songs by the singer Judy Bridgewater. One day Madame randomly encountered Kathy, who was singing one of the songs from the tape called "*Never Let Me Go*" and pretending to hold a baby in her arms. At this sigh, Madame started to cry - presumably because she felt the injustice done to Kathy and other clones due to the fact that they cannot have their own children (all clones are born infertile). It therefore appears that Madame is not as cold-hearted as she seemed to be during the first chapters. This moment later enhances the feeling of hope that there truly may be what is called a "deferral". The rumours about the "deferrals" stated that if two former students from Hailsham are truly in love they can receive a special permission to postpone their donations and live at least a few years together.

With the idea of "deferrals" the author unquestionably introduces a certain feeling of hope into the novel. To be more specific, the hope that Kathy's and others' destinies may not be completely sealed after all. This element of hope is crucial for the novel, because the plot itself could not function without it. It allows Ishiguro to work with the reader's emotions and, more importantly, to arrange the crushing ending of the whole novel. To some degree, it could be also interpreted as the author's reminder on the importance of hope in life. It is also interesting that in the plot this feeling of hope was fabricated

amongst the students themselves, originally perhaps only to cheer up others or have something to talk about.

Right after reaching the age required to leave Hailsham, Kathy and her friends were sent to the place called Cottages, which was just an old farm converted for them to live in. Here, they were supposed to prepare for their future roles as “carers”. Except for Kathy, Tommy, Ruth and a few more former students, there were no other permanent residents. Only an old man named Keffers, who reassured the supply of some basic needs. However, unlike from Hailsham, they could leave the Cottages whenever they wanted to. Not only permanently when they felt that they are ready to become “carers”, but also to take road trips.

It was during one of these trips when Chrissie and Rodney, Kathy’s and her friends’ room-mates at the Cottages, presumably came across Ruth’s “possible”. The term “possible” indicates a person who was used as the template for clones. It is at this point, set almost precisely in the middle of the novel, when Kathy finally specifically emphasises that she and all of her fellow students are in fact human clones:

*Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life. This meant, at least in theory, you’d be able to find the person you were modelled from.*

*(Never Let Me Go 2005, p. 127)*

Chrissie and Rodney described this “possible” as an older woman working in an office. This made Ruth truly excited, because she has often entertained the idea that she could find a way to work in an office one day. That is why the image of seeing this woman, in theory her older *self*, doing Ruth’s dream job appealed to her so much. It would help to extend her hopes that she is indeed suited for this kind of career. It is interesting that Ruth preserved this hopefulness, considering that she was well aware of the future that awaited

her. This shows that although all the main characters of the novel have known what awaits them, some of them never fully lost their hope until the inevitable end. However, after the close encounter with the woman who was supposed to be Ruth's "possible", everyone agreed that it was not the case; and so no one mentioned this topic again.

Nevertheless, Norfolk trip did produce an important moment. It was because of Tommy, who remembered Kathy's long lost cassette tape, and tried to find it in the town's cassette stores and buy it for her. He had not succeeded on his own, so he decided to reveal his intention to Kathy. He told her that he had looked for the tape right after she lost it at Hailsham, and remembered it ever since. Kathy was delighted by this gesture and agreed to join him in his search. Together, they managed to find the tape and, more importantly, bring back some memories from their childhood. This moment shows how valuable their friendship has been for Tommy. On top of that, it unmistakably emphasizes that their mutual feelings towards each other have always been very strong.

While being at the Cottages, Tommy had been painting pictures of fictional animals. He hoped that if he is creative enough he could later seek out Madame and show her his work. Madame could then get his donations postponed. Tommy got this idea based on the fact that during their days at Hailsham all the students were told to try to be as creative as possible. However, Ruth and Kathy did not share his hopes and both believed that the plan itself is foolish. All three had later a row about it. Shortly after this, Kathy left the Cottages and became a "carer", reconciled with the idea of never seeing her friends again.

After years of "caring", Kathy's reputation of a reliable and successful carer allows her to choose her own patients. After talking to one of her former classmates and now fellow carer Lara, Kathy finally decides to seek out Ruth. Despite the fact that Ruth already gave her first donation, Kathy quickly becomes her new carer and they both get a chance to talk about their mutual

history. While their former disagreements are still present, it becomes promptly clear that they are both keen to restore their friendship.

After the long talks resembling their childhood and discussing their past mistakes, they arrange a trip to see an old, wracked boat. They also get together with Tommy, who is already a donor as well. Ruth reveals to them that she selfishly tried to keep Kathy and Tommy apart, although she had always felt that they belonged to each other. She still feels guilty about it and as a redemption she offers them Madame's address. She believes that they can successfully ask her for the delay of their donations and have a chance to be together after all. After giving her third donation, Ruth "completes" soon after this trip.

Kathy and Tommy then become lovers and decide to follow Ruth's advice and visit Madame. They do so with a cautious, but undeniable feelings of hope in their minds. However, in Madame's house, where they also meet Miss Emily, all their hopes of a life beyond donations are quickly crushed. They learn that no such thing as the "deferrals" for clones in love ever existed. After hearing this hard truth, Tommy undergoes an uncontrolled outburst of anger similar to the ones he experienced throughout his childhood. However, this is basically the only emotional moment they both express while being together. Soon after, Tommy prepares for his fourth donation. They say goodbye to each other and Kathy simply moves on with her work. So instead of a fight, or at least some more effort to change their fate, Kathy and Tommy both quietly accept it as a fact that they will donate all their vital organs and "complete".

In this moment, the reader's frustration with Kathy's actions is presumably climaxing. This deeply-rooted sense of certainty and reconciliation with her own fate is nothing new in literature, yet it seems strange and frustrating in the context of the story. Kathy and Tommy are in love and obviously want to be together. Moreover, Kathy repeatedly proves that she is an emotionally strong person and surely is capable of taking the matters into her own hands.

Still, after just talking to Madame and Miss Lucy they both apathetically accept their fate. So what exactly is the author trying to say with this? It actually works on several levels.

Firstly, it is most likely Ishiguro's way of showing the reader the inevitability of fate. For sometimes there is just nothing that the person can do about their destiny. Arguably; Kathy, Tommy and other clones were simply being realistic and knew that there was no possibility of changing their lives. This might seem too depressing, but it surely corresponds with the dim dystopian reality in which some unfortunate human beings are created solely as organ donors. However, this can be hardly further analysed as in the narration itself there are basically no details about the society depicted in the novel.

Secondly, it subtly emphasizes the importance of education. Kathy and Tommy were being prepared for their future all their lives. In Hailsham, they were taught that they are special and that their life has a clear purpose. So it could be possible that they were so deeply reconciled with the fact that they must donate their organs that they did not even think about revolting or turning against the system in some way. It shows how easily society can manipulate someone for the benefit of the majority. In the novel, regular people are clearly taking advantage of clones. It seems that clones are being manipulated to believe that what happens to them is just and the only possibility. This evident manipulation is perhaps the reason why no one in the novel ever thinks about protesting against the inhumane practice of donations.

Finally, the idea of Kathy's apathy towards her fate might originate from Ishiguro's Japanese descent. There is little doubt that Japanese literature tends to seem more detached or even emotionless in comparison to the traditional European fiction. After all, Ishiguro never denied that he is influenced by Japanese culture: *"...they felt responsible for keeping me in touch with Japanese values. I do have a distinct background. I think*

*differently, my perspectives are slightly different.*"<sup>18</sup> So Kathy's actions in the novel could also be the reflection of the author's Japanese origin.

In the final pages of the novel, Kathy coldly states that Tommy "completed" and she just received her summoning to become a donor:

*[...] though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn't sobbing or out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be.*

*(Never Let Me Go 2005, p. 266)*

This very last two sentences of the novel really show Kathy's emotional strength. The depressing storyline ending also gathers together a feeling of hopelessness that prevailed throughout the whole narration, while at the same time evokes sympathy towards the novel's main protagonist.

### **6.3. Conclusion**

At first, it is needed to conclude one of the most important questions - who is to blame for the cruel fate that awaits all human clones? The easy answer is that the blame falls on society as a whole. In the case of *Never Let Me Go*, the reader cannot be sure about the political or any other fundamental parts of the depicted country. It can be only assumed that it is very similar to contemporary western culture. However, the fact that such practices as creating human beings with the sole purpose of gaining their vital organs for donations are tolerated by most people show the defective side of this society. Simply put, the novel's main antagonist and evil force is society itself.

The obvious characteristic of the plot and the novel as a whole, with its slowly revealing facts and then at times suddenly emotional narration, is that it is aimed to shock the reader. And while this is undoubtedly true, it is important to stress out the other effect it has - it provokes and raises some controversial

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<sup>18</sup> <<http://bombmagazine.org/article/1269/kazuo-ishiguro>>

topics. Ishiguro subtly and indirectly presents topics like human morality in the wake of new technologies, wickedness of our society and other current problems. In future, it could also present a moral dilemma in terms of whether the cloned people should have human rights or not.

On the whole, the novel *Never Let Me Go* can be without any doubt described as a very personal and intimate novel, mainly thanks to its approachable first-person narration. The subtleness and sensitivity with which Ishiguro raises the controversial questions and important topics is quite uncharacteristic within the science fiction genre, especially when compared to some of its well-known classics. Still, it fits very well amongst dystopian fiction with its humane approach, discomfiting subtext and the illustration of clearly flawed society.



## 7. Common themes of both novels

Despite the fact that *Never Let Me Go* was written seventy years later and is using vastly different narrative techniques and plot devices, it deals with number of identical topics as the dystopian classic *Brave New World*. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that while writing about similar subjects, both authors often used quite different ways to express their thoughts.

### 7.1. Ethically wrong usage of modern technologies

It would be very short-sighted to state that all authors of dystopian literature are against scientific progress. The objective of authors of this literary subgenre is usually to warn against the potential or already present issues, or at least encourage the debate concerning them. The most prominent topics are usually loss of freedom and the danger of totalitarian regimes. This is of course where modern technologies step into spotlight. The endless possibilities of their usage provide science fiction authors with equally endless ideas concerning the future of human kind. Naturally, some of them always tried to see things from their potentially dangerous perspective. That is where dystopia starts as the subgenre of science fiction literature, and it is what makes modern technologies an important topic in the context of this thesis.

In *Never Let Me Go*, there are only two technologies that are important in the context of the narrative - cloning and advanced organ transplantation. And while the author omits any details about them, it is clear that these two biomedical technologies are misused. Although they are used for the benefit of most citizens (they receive organs from clones), it hardly validates the injustice done to clones themselves. It can be concluded that the possibility of cloning directly leads to the suffering of human clones.

Huxley's *Brave New World* is much more straightforward. The technology used by the World State is depicted more clearly and it is evident that the

author criticizes it. For example, cloning is used to achieve stable and obeying society, which benefits the controllers and leaders of the World State rather than its citizens. While in *Never Let Me Go* modern technology allows society to exploit clones for the benefit of majority, the leaders of dystopian society in *Brave New World* use even more advanced technology to control everyone.

All in all, especially the idea of ill-used human cloning is prominent in both novels. Therefore, with the present-day progress of biomedical engineering and other similar technologies, it is perhaps more important than ever to ask whether dystopian visions like those of both novels could be fulfilled.

## **7.2. Cloning**

The important difference between the two novels in this topic is that in *Never Let Me Go* Ishiguro completely ignores the scientific aspect of cloning. The reader can therefore only image how the whole cloning process works or how the procedure of donations succeed. However, this is hardly surprising considering Ishiguro's previous literary works. He is rarely straightforward and is usually trying to conceal the important issues with his writing, and provoke the reader into comprehensive thinking. This also the case of *Never Let Me Go* where detailed scientific descriptions would be completely unnecessary, because the cloning itself is not the main topic. As mentioned previously in this thesis, it is merely a tool with which Ishiguro accomplishes his goals – rising taboo questions and making his readers think about contemporary (and future) moral issues.

On the other hand, in *Brave New World* the reader is acquainted with the process of cloning within the first few pages. Huxley describes it in detail too:

*“...the operation undergone voluntarily for the good of Society, not to mention the fact that it carries a bonus amounting to six months' salary”; continued with some account of the technique for preserving the excised ovary alive and actively developing; passed on to a consideration of*

*optimum temperature, salinity, viscosity; referred to the liquor in which the detached and ripened eggs were kept; [...] inspected for abnormalities, counted and transferred to a porous receptacle...how the fertilized ova went back to the incubators; where the Alphas and Betas remained until definitely bottled...*

*(Brave New World 1982, p. 6)*

Huxley is of course much more a traditional dystopian (and therefore science fiction) author. His novel *Brave New World* is warning us against the potential “side effects” of scientific progress. He is doing so with much detailed imagery of his fictional and obviously flawed totalitarian society. Therefore, the author uses the detailed descriptions of every part of the World State to shock the reader and to clearly manifest his scary vision.

Without any doubt, one of the most unscrupulous parts of the society depicted in Huxley’s novel is the classification of yet to be born human clones into different social casts. This method, which could not be achievable without cloning, is obviously highly immoral. The whole process of altering human embryos is possible only due to very advanced technology, which makes the ill-use of the whole cloning procedure one of the foundations of Huxley’s criticism.

Perhaps surprisingly, one aspect of cloning is very similar in both novels. It is the fact that clones have their lives set out for them. In *Never Let Me Go*, clones never really have a chance to do anything with their lives other than spent some time “caring” for fellow clones who donate their vital organs, and then do the same. In *Brave New World*, the entire human population is being divided into the different social casts long before they are even born. Due to the conditioning (which is basically a form of brainwashing) and the damage purposefully done to the embryos of lower casts, it is also essentially impossible for them to change their future.

### **7.3. The inevitability of fate**

Kathy, the first-person narrator used by Ishiguro in his dystopian novel, shares the same inevitability of fate with all clones in her world. She can be certain that she will be forced to donate all her vital organs to other people. And while death is inevitable for every human, the tragedy of Kathy's life is that she cannot control her destiny - she cannot choose a profession, she cannot marry or simply live her life away from hospitals and donations. Her fate is set out for her right at the moment of her "creation".

Interestingly, Kathy seems to be at peace with her fate. And while this is debateable, perhaps the author is suggesting that everyone should accept that some things in life are simply inevitable no matter what people do and it is best to just accept them. Furthermore, the author could be emphasising that although our life choices seem to be endless, death is the only possible outcome for us - as it is for the clones in the novel. And while this may seem a bit pessimistic, it would certainly correspond with the feeling of hopelessness that is evoked within the ending of the novel.

In *Brave New World's* narration, John faces other challenge. John struggles his whole life with the lack of identity. This derives from the fact that he had been risen in an unconditioned society by a conditioned mother. On top of that, even people on the Reservation themselves shunned him. His dream throughout the childhood was a better life in the World State. When Bernard offers him to take him there, John embraces it as a chance for a new life.

However, it is soon clear that he will never succeed to find his "home" there. His moral and internal values are vastly different from the ones that are dear to the World State's citizens. Apart from potentially following Bernard into exile (which was not permitted to him), John simply never had a real chance to live his life peacefully. It is therefore inevitable that he finds himself alone and broken in the end of the novel. John's struggles could therefore represent a person who can never fit in society and unavoidably faces a lifelong challenge of pursuing his dreams.

Bernard's struggles are similar. His fate, which is life in exile on an island, suggests that after his failed conditioning he too could not hope for anything else. He was just too different. Despite his unwillingness to leave the World State, it is clear that he could never find permanent happiness there. This corresponds with sometimes irrational struggle of some people to conserve their lives and to avoid any change despite being generally unhappy. Perhaps Bernard's inevitable fate was not only to live in exile, but to accept the truth that he could never find happiness in the World State. Interestingly, his friend Helmholtz, who is also exiled, already embraces this change as a new opportunity. To conclude this idea, Bernard's and Helmholtz's fates were the same, but their attitude towards it is what separates them.

#### **7.4. Sexuality**

All clones in the fictional world of *Never Let Me Go* are infertile. Despite that, the main protagonist Kathy struggles during her puberty with frequent urges to have sex. And while other clones are also sexually active, she feels that her urges are much more frequent than those of her friends. She thinks that it could be caused by her "possible", which is a person she was cloned from. And although it is never further explained by the author, it could symbolise that Kathy does not only control her destiny, but she cannot even have a control over her own body.

In *Brave New World*, the topic of sexuality is much more important. The World State's citizens are prompted to have as much sexual partners as possible and perceive sex as a casual activity. Homogamy is basically regarded as an antisocial behaviour. This parallels with the abolishment of any serious relationships and the concept of love itself:

*After all, the open encouragement of promiscuity in Brave New World is intended not to stimulate sexual passions, but to reduce them by making sex a virtually meaningless activity.*

*(The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature 1994, p. 53)*

By making sex a casual activity deprived of any true feelings, it is possible to ensure that regular members of society will not develop any close attachments or relationships. In this way, it is easier for the World State to control its citizens and to oversee their behaviour. To justify this, people are simply led to believe that feelings for each other only stand in a way of true happiness, which is supposedly achieved only by a random pleasure and overall carelessness. With this, Huxley explores the idea of society that is so strongly totalitarian that even personal feelings are strictly controlled.

## 8. Comparison of the narrative perspectives

*“Ishiguro’s choice of first-person narrator validates the emotional life of these characters and makes the reader confront the unthinkable.”*<sup>19</sup> This emotional “validation” also originates from the author’s way of depicting the whole plot. He puts the characters in natural, everyday situations and therefore never actually allows the reader to question their humanity. Furthermore, thanks to this it is hard not to feel sympathy towards the main protagonists in the climax of the story. It is difficult for the reader to accept the shocking reality that these human beings with real emotions, feelings and desires are basically sentenced to death from the very beginning of their lives.

In *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy, the first-person narrator used by Ishiguro, depicts her story without revealing almost any details about the world she lives in. She is unfolding her story as she was telling it to someone familiar with the background of her world. This technique brings up a very mystifying nature into the novel, which (as already mentioned before in this thesis) serves the author to his benefit.

On the other hand, the narration of *Brave New World* is much more traditional. This is of course understandable since it was written more than eighty years ago. The narration is from the third-person omniscient perspective, with frequent use of direct speeches. Unlike Ishiguro, Huxley wants the reader to know a lot of precise information and uses long descriptions of events. This is perhaps the main difference between the two novels - in *Brave New World* the issues are specifically stressed out. To achieve this, Huxley uses two main protagonists, John and Bernard, to express their opinions about the World State’s society and its practices.

On the whole, Ishiguro’s narration works with the element of mystery and feels very personal. The first-person narrative technique also makes the reader feel more involved in the plot and enhances authenticity of the whole

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<sup>19</sup> Bickley 2008, p. 47

storyline. It feels very different in comparison to Huxley's conventional use of the third-person omniscient narration, which relies mainly on detailed descriptions and uses more protagonists and information to express the main topics. Moreover, Kathy's first-person narration used in *Never Let Me Go* is often non-chronological, which further enhances the difference between both analysed narrative perspectives.



## 9. Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis was to analyse the novel *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro and to compare it with the dystopian classic *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, which was analysed as well.

In the second chapter it was pointed out that dystopian literature is generally used to call attention to the danger of authoritarian regimes and misused modern technologies. Fictional societies depicted in dystopia are usually clearly flawed. This is of course true for both analysed novels as their main antagonists and evil forces are societies itself. And while Ishiguro criticises practices of his alternative world's society more subtly than Huxley, they both use the personal tragedies of their main protagonists to enhance the feelings of hopelessness and shock.

Perhaps the most mention worthy fact that comes from the analysis of Huxley's novel *Brave New World* is that while some of his ideas portrayed in the novel seem nowadays quite far-fetched, others sound shockingly similar to present reality. In the analysis of *Never Let Me Go* it was mentioned that, apart from other controversial themes, Ishiguro subtly raises a very intriguing question for future - whether the cloned people should have human rights or not. This question is perhaps still too theoretical to present an answer for it, but nonetheless it clearly shows the unlimited potential of the novel's storyline.

After separately analysing both novels, the thesis then focused on those topics that were present in both of them. The most prominent ones - ethically wrong usage of technology, cloning, the inevitability of fate and sexuality - were further examined and concluded. From this comparison it became evident that while both authors used these topics very differently in their

varied narratives, they tried to achieve quite similar objectives – mainly to shock the reader and raise important moral questions.

On the whole, apart from some common themes and the fact that both novels depict fictional flawed societies, it can be concluded that they have only very little in common. Ishiguro's intimate first-person narration works primarily with subtleness and elements of mystery, while Huxley's straightforward storytelling features a lot of information and many detailed descriptions. Moreover, Ishiguro often uses non-linear narrative in his novels, which is also present in *Never Let Me Go* and therefore further distinguishes it from Huxley's traditional linear storyline.

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