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Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*: A Posthumanist Reading



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Abstract

This study explores the interconnected themes of trauma, memory, and identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* through a posthumanist perspective. The research investigates how cloned individuals experience psychological and existential trauma, how memory functions as a means of preserving selfhood, and how identity is constructed within a society shaped by technological control and institutional exploitation. Using a qualitative research design based on close reading and textual analysis, the study examines the experiences of Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth as they negotiate their existence as clones destined for organ donation. The analysis reveals that trauma emerges through social exclusion, dehumanization, loss of autonomy, and awareness of predetermined mortality. Memory serves as a crucial mechanism through which the characters reconstruct their past, preserve emotional relationships, and maintain continuity between past and present experiences. The study further demonstrates that identity is not determined by biological origin but is formed through memory, consciousness, relationships, and lived experiences. The findings indicate that the cloned characters continuously struggle to affirm their humanity despite being reduced to biological resources by social institutions. Through the experiences of the clones, the novel challenges conventional definitions of humanity and exposes the ethical consequences of technological exploitation. The study concludes that trauma, memory, and identity are deeply interconnected forces that contribute to the formation of posthuman subjectivity. By redefining humanity through emotional experience, memory, and ethical relationships, the novel presents a powerful critique of dehumanisation and offers a broader understanding of human identity in the age of biotechnology.

Keywords: Trauma, Memory, Identity, Posthumanism, *Never Let Me Go*

1. Introduction

The concepts of trauma, memory, and identity have emerged as central concerns in contemporary literary studies, particularly in works that examine the ethical and existential implications of technological advancement. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) presents a dystopian society in which human clones are created solely for organ donation. Through the lives of Kathy H., Tommy, and Ruth, the novel explores how individuals construct meaning and maintain a sense of self despite existing within a system that denies their humanity. The narrative raises fundamental questions about what it means to be human and how memory and trauma shape identity in a technologically mediated world.

Trauma theory provides a useful framework for understanding the psychological experiences of the cloned characters. According to Caruth (1996), trauma is characterised by experiences that resist immediate comprehension and return through fragmented recollections. In *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy narrates her life through memories that reveal the emotional consequences of living with the knowledge of an inevitable and predetermined fate. Her recollections of Hailsham, friendships, and lost opportunities function as attempts to make sense of a traumatic existence. Whitehead

(2004) argues that trauma narratives frequently employ fragmented memories to represent psychological disruption and emotional suffering (p. 5). Similarly, Waham (2023) observes that Ishiguro's characters remain haunted by past experiences that continue to shape their identities and emotional responses (p. 17).

Memory serves as a crucial element in the preservation and construction of identity throughout the novel. Assmann (2011) contends that memory enables individuals and communities to maintain continuity between the past and present. Kathy's narrative demonstrates how personal memories serve to preserve individuality in a society that treats clones as biological commodities. Her persistent recollections of Hailsham and her relationships with Tommy and Ruth allow her to affirm her humanity despite the institutional structures designed to reduce her existence to a medical function. Through memory, the characters create meaningful identities that challenge the dehumanising logic of the cloning system.

The novel also invites a posthumanist interpretation by challenging traditional humanist assumptions about the uniqueness and superiority of human beings. Posthumanism questions rigid distinctions between the human and the nonhuman and examines the effects of science and technology on concepts of subjectivity and identity. Hayles (1999) argues that contemporary understandings of humanity are increasingly shaped by technological developments that blur the boundaries between biological and artificial life (p. 3). Likewise, Braidotti (2013) asserts that posthumanism calls for a reconsideration of human identity beyond the limitations of classical humanist thought (p. 26). In Ishiguro's novel, the clones possess emotions, memories, desires, and moral sensibilities comparable to those of ordinary humans, yet they are denied social recognition and fundamental rights.

From a posthumanist perspective, identity in *Never Let Me Go* is neither fixed nor biologically determined. Instead, it is constructed through relationships, memories, and lived experiences. Sing (2021) argues that the novel exposes the ethical contradictions of technological progress by portraying cloned individuals whose humanity is systematically denied despite their emotional and psychological complexity (p. 150). The characters experience profound identity crises as they struggle to reconcile their human consciousness with their socially imposed status as organ donors. Their search for meaning highlights the instability of identity within technologically engineered systems of power.

Furthermore, the trauma experienced by the clones is deeply connected to the biopolitical structures that govern their lives. The institutions depicted in the novel normalise exploitation and reduce human bodies to sources of biological value. Mahmood et al. (2022) maintain that the novel demonstrates how technological and ideological systems contribute to the construction of fragmented and imploded identities among cloned subjects (p. 341). The emotional consequences of this dehumanisation are evident in the characters' recurring experiences of fear, uncertainty, loss, and resignation.

This study examines the interconnected themes of trauma, memory, and identity in *Never Let Me Go* through a posthumanist lens. By analysing Kathy's narrative memories and the experiences of the cloned characters, the research investigates how trauma shapes identity formation and how memory functions as a form of resistance against dehumanisation. The study contributes to contemporary discussions of posthumanism by demonstrating that Ishiguro's novel critiques technological exploitation while simultaneously redefining humanity through the emotional and

mnemonic experiences of marginalised subjects.

1.1 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it explores the interconnected themes of trauma, memory, and identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* through a posthumanist perspective. While previous studies have examined the novel's dystopian and ethical dimensions, limited research has focused on how trauma and memory contribute to the construction of identity within a posthuman framework. The study contributes to contemporary literary criticism by demonstrating how cloned individuals negotiate their sense of self despite systemic dehumanisation and exploitation. Furthermore, it enriches posthumanist scholarship by highlighting the role of memory and emotional experience in redefining humanity beyond biological boundaries. The findings may also provide valuable insights for researchers interested in posthumanism, trauma studies, memory studies, and contemporary dystopian fiction.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To examine the representation of trauma in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* from a posthumanist perspective.
2. To analyse the role of memory in the construction and preservation of identity among the cloned characters.
3. To explore how the novel challenges traditional notions of humanity and identity through the experiences of cloned subjects.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How is trauma represented in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* from a posthumanist perspective?
2. What role does memory play in shaping the identities of the cloned characters in the novel?
3. How does *Never Let Me Go* challenge conventional humanist concepts of humanity and identity through its portrayal of clones?

2. Literature Review

The themes of trauma, memory, and identity have attracted considerable scholarly attention in contemporary literary studies, particularly in narratives that explore the consequences of scientific and technological intervention in human life. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* has become a significant text in this regard because it examines the lives of cloned individuals whose existence is shaped by institutional control, social exclusion, and predetermined mortality. Scholars have approached the novel from various perspectives, including trauma studies, memory studies, biopolitics, ethics, dystopian fiction, and posthumanism (Caruth, 1996; Whitehead, 2004; Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 1999).

Trauma theory provides an important framework for understanding the psychological experiences of the cloned characters. Caruth (1996) argues that trauma is often characterised by delayed understanding and repetitive recollection of painful experiences. Expanding this view, Whitehead (2004) maintains that traumatic

memories frequently emerge in fragmented forms that disrupt narrative coherence. Applying these ideas to Ishiguro's fiction, Waham (2023) observes that Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth remain haunted by memories that continue to shape their identities and emotional lives. According to Maslida and Wajiran (2025), the novel depicts both personal and collective trauma through repetitive memories, emotional suppression, and narrative fragmentation. Their findings suggest that the clones' awareness of their future organ donations generates a persistent psychological burden that influences their perception of self.

Memory occupies a central position in the novel and has been widely discussed by critics. Assmann (2011) argues that memory serves as a mechanism through which individuals establish continuity between past and present experiences. In *Never Let Me Go*, memory functions not merely as recollection but as a means of preserving identity in the face of social dehumanisation. Wongchalard (2025) contends that Kathy's act of remembering constitutes a form of posthuman agency because her narrative allows marginalised subjects to reclaim their experiences and affirm their existence. Similarly, Katsorchi (2023) argues that storytelling operates as a form of resistance through which posthuman subjects preserve their identities against institutional erasure. Both studies emphasise that memory enables the clones to construct meaningful selves despite living within oppressive structures.

Identity formation is another major concern in scholarship on the novel. Hall (1996) conceptualises identity as a dynamic and continuously evolving process rather than a fixed essence. This perspective is particularly relevant to the cloned characters, whose identities are shaped by external classifications and internal struggles for self-definition. Mahmood et al. (2022) argue that the novel's ideological structures contribute to the construction of "imploded identities" among the clones. The educational system at Hailsham, while appearing protective, ultimately prepares the students to accept their predetermined social roles. As a result, the clones develop fragmented identities that reflect both conformity and resistance.

The emergence of posthumanist theory has significantly influenced interpretations of *Never Let Me Go*. Hayles (1999) argues that technological developments challenge traditional understandings of human identity by blurring the boundaries between the biological and the artificial. Likewise, Braidotti (2013) proposes a posthuman conception of subjectivity that moves beyond humanist assumptions regarding uniqueness and superiority. Within this framework, Ishiguro's clones challenge conventional definitions of humanity by possessing emotions, memories, and ethical capacities despite being denied human status. Sing (2021) argues that the novel exposes tensions between transhumanist aspirations and critical posthumanist ethics, revealing the dangers of technological progress when divorced from moral responsibility.

Researchers have also explored the role of discourse and narrative in shaping cultural meanings and identity construction. Narrative discourse not only communicates experiences but also influences how individuals understand themselves and their social realities. McDonald (2007) characterises *Never Let Me Go* as a speculative memoir in which memory functions as the primary mode of narration. Toker and Chertoff (2008) argue that the gradual disclosure of information encourages readers to participate in constructing meaning, while Whitehead (2011) emphasises the ethical dimensions of narrative memory in fostering empathy for marginalised subjects. Beyond literary narratives, discourse studies have similarly demonstrated how

language constructs cultural identities and social meanings. For example, Akram and Sartaj (2026), in their discourse analysis of Pakistani English memes, show how linguistic creativity and cultural humour contribute to identity formation and meaning-making within specific social contexts. Although their study focuses on digital discourse rather than literary fiction, it highlights the broader significance of language and representation in shaping individual and collective identities. These perspectives collectively underscore the importance of discourse and narrative as mechanisms through which experiences, memories, and identities are constructed and interpreted.

Several scholars have examined the ethical implications of cloning in the novel. Griffin (2009) argues that Ishiguro uses biotechnology to question contemporary assumptions about scientific advancement and human value. Similarly, Rai (2024) contends that the novel critiques systems that reduce individuals to biological resources while simultaneously exploring possibilities for resistance and agency. According to Rai (2024), the clones' emotional relationships and aspirations challenge the social structures that deny their humanity. These interpretations demonstrate how ethical concerns intersect with questions of identity and personhood within posthuman contexts.

The relationship between memory and posthuman subjectivity has recently become an important area of inquiry. Wongchalard (2025) argues that memory allows posthuman subjects to assert agency despite institutional oppression. Rather than viewing Kathy's narration as passive acceptance, Wongchalard interprets her recollections as acts of self-preservation and resistance. Likewise, Baral (2025) maintains that emotional and ethical relationships constitute forms of posthuman subjectivity that challenge exclusionary definitions of humanity. These studies suggest that memory and emotional attachment function as significant tools through which posthuman subjects negotiate their identities.

Researchers have also explored narrative strategies in the novel. McDonald (2007) characterises *Never Let Me Go* as a speculative memoir in which memory becomes the primary mode of narration. Toker and Chertoff (2008) emphasise the role of reader response in uncovering the novel's hidden realities, arguing that the gradual revelation of the clones' fate intensifies the narrative's emotional impact. Whitehead (2011) further suggests that Ishiguro employs an ethics of care through narrative memory, encouraging readers to empathise with marginalised and vulnerable subjects. These studies collectively demonstrate how narrative structure contributes to the representation of trauma and identity.

Human rights and ethical concerns constitute another important strand of criticism. Levy (2011) argues that the novel functions as a human-rights narrative that exposes forms of systemic violence against marginalised populations. Robbins (2007) similarly examines the ethical implications of ordinary cruelty and social indifference in the treatment of clones. These scholars suggest that the novel critiques not only scientific exploitation but also broader social mechanisms that normalise inequality and exclusion. From a broader theoretical perspective, Haraway (1991) challenges traditional distinctions between humans and nonhumans through the concept of the cyborg, while Hayles (1999) emphasises the increasing integration of technology into human existence. Braidotti (2013) further develops these ideas by proposing a relational model of subjectivity based on interconnectedness and ethical responsibility. These theoretical contributions have provided scholars with valuable tools for

interpreting the experiences of cloned subjects in Ishiguro's novel.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on *Never Let Me Go*, several gaps remain. Existing studies often focus exclusively on trauma (Waham, 2023; Maslida & Wajiran, 2025), memory (Wongchalard, 2025), ethical dilemmas (Rai, 2024), or posthuman identity (Mahmood et al., 2022; Sing, 2021). However, relatively few studies examine the interconnected relationship among trauma, memory, and identity within a unified posthumanist framework. Moreover, much of the existing scholarship treats these themes separately rather than investigating how memory mediates trauma and contributes to the construction of posthuman identity. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring how trauma, memory, and identity operate collectively in *Never Let Me Go* and how these themes contribute to a broader understanding of posthuman subjectivity and humanity in the age of biotechnology.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design based on textual analysis. Qualitative literary research is suitable for examining complex themes, meanings, and representations within literary texts. The study adopts an interpretive approach to investigate the interconnected themes of trauma, memory, and identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* through a posthumanist lens. Qualitative textual analysis enables the researcher to explore how literary language, narrative structure, characterisation, and symbolic elements contribute to the construction of meaning within the novel. Recent studies on *Never Let Me Go* have also utilised qualitative textual and thematic analysis to examine trauma, memory, and posthuman identity.

3.2 Research Method

The study employs close reading and textual analysis as the primary research methods. Close reading facilitates a detailed examination of narrative events, character experiences, dialogues, and descriptions related to trauma, memory, and identity. Textual analysis is used to interpret how these themes are represented and interconnected throughout the novel. Through repeated reading and interpretation of the text, the study identifies significant passages that reflect the psychological experiences and identity formation of the cloned characters. Similar qualitative textual approaches have been used in previous studies of *Never Let Me Go* to analyse memory, trauma, dehumanisation, and posthuman subjectivity.

3.3 Primary Text

The primary source of data for this study is Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005). The novel serves as the sole primary text because it provides extensive representations of cloning, memory, trauma, and identity formation within a dystopian and posthuman context.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Posthumanist Theory and is supported by concepts from Trauma Theory and Memory Studies. The framework provides a comprehensive lens for examining the interconnected themes of trauma, memory, and identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*.

3.4.1 Posthumanist Theory

The primary theoretical framework of this study is Posthumanism, particularly the works of N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti. Posthumanism challenges traditional humanist beliefs that define humanity through rationality, autonomy, and biological uniqueness. Instead, it questions the boundaries between human and nonhuman beings and explores how technological developments reshape concepts of identity and subjectivity.

Hayles (1999) argues that contemporary technological advancements blur the distinction between natural and artificial life, leading to new forms of posthuman subjectivity. Similarly, Braidotti (2013) proposes that identity should be understood as fluid, relational, and continuously evolving rather than fixed and essential. These ideas are particularly relevant to *Never Let Me Go*, in which cloned individuals possess emotions, memories, and consciousness similar to humans' but are denied social recognition and fundamental rights. Through a posthumanist perspective, the novel challenges conventional definitions of humanity and exposes the ethical consequences of technological exploitation.

The posthumanist framework enables this study to investigate how Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth construct their identities despite existing within a system that reduces them to biological resources. It also facilitates an examination of how the novel redefines humanity through emotional experience, memory, and interpersonal relationships rather than biological origin.

3.4.2 Trauma Theory

To examine the psychological experiences of the cloned characters, this study incorporates Trauma Theory, particularly the work of Cathy Caruth. According to Caruth (1996), trauma refers to experiences that are not fully understood when they occur and therefore return later through memories, repetition, and emotional distress. Traumatic experiences often resist direct representation and are revealed through fragmented recollections and narrative disruptions.

In *Never Let Me Go*, the clones experience a form of existential trauma resulting from their awareness of their predetermined fate as organ donors. Kathy's memories reveal feelings of loss, uncertainty, and emotional suffering that continue to shape her understanding of herself and others. Trauma Theory helps explain how these experiences shape identity formation and contribute to the characters' psychological development.

3.4.3 Memory Studies

The study also draws upon Memory Studies, particularly the work of Jan Assmann. Assmann (2011) argues that memory is fundamental to the construction of individual and collective identity because it creates continuity between past and present experiences. Memory functions not only as recollection but also as a means of preserving meaning, values, and selfhood.

In *Never Let Me Go*, memory serves as the central narrative mechanism through which Kathy reconstructs her past and affirms her identity. Her recollections of Hailsham, her friendships, and her experiences with Tommy and Ruth enable her to maintain a sense of self despite institutional dehumanisation. Memory, therefore, becomes a form of resistance against the forces that seek to reduce the clones to mere biological objects.

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3.5 Data Collection

Data are collected through intensive and repeated reading of the novel. Relevant textual extracts, dialogues, narrative descriptions, and character reflections associated with trauma, memory, and identity are identified and selected. Notes and thematic categories are developed during the reading process to facilitate systematic analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data are analysed through thematic textual analysis. The analysis is conducted in three stages:

3.6.1 Stage One: Trauma Analysis

Selected textual passages are examined using Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma to identify representations of psychological suffering, emotional repression, loss, fear, and the awareness of predetermined mortality among the cloned characters.

3.6.2 Stage Two: Memory Analysis

The study analyses Kathy's recollections and narrative memories to explore how memory serves to preserve personal experiences, reconstruct the past, and maintain a sense of self despite social marginalisation.

3.6.3 Stage Three: Identity Analysis Through a Posthumanist Lens

The final stage investigates how trauma and memory contribute to the construction of identity within a posthuman framework. Using the concepts proposed by Hayles and Braidotti, the analysis examines how the cloned characters challenge traditional definitions of humanity, agency, and subjectivity.

3.7 Delimitation of the Study

This study is limited to Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005). It focuses exclusively on the themes of trauma, memory, and identity from a posthumanist perspective. Other aspects of the novel, such as gender studies, Marxist criticism, ecocriticism, or linguistic stylistics, are beyond the scope of this research.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Trauma Analysis in *Never Let Me Go*

Trauma is one of the central themes in *Never Let Me Go*. The clones experience psychological trauma resulting from social exclusion, predetermined mortality, institutional control, and the realisation that they are regarded as less than human. Using Cathy Caruth's (1996) Trauma Theory, trauma can be understood as an overwhelming experience that continues to shape an individual's consciousness through memory and emotional suffering.

Table 4.1

Instances of Trauma in the Novel

Theme	Textual Evidence	Page	Interpretation
Social Rejection	"She was afraid of us... in the same way someone might be	p. 29	The clones experience emotional trauma when they realise they are viewed as nonhuman and

Identity Crisis	afraid of spiders" "You really are different to them"	p. 29	threatening. The realisation of difference creates psychological distress and a fragmented sense of self.
Institutional Oppression	"What's going to happen to us one day. Donations and all that."	p. 25	The awareness of future organ donation creates existential trauma and anxiety.
Emotional Suffering	"It was a cold moment"	p. 29	Kathy describes the painful recognition of her social status, reflecting traumatic self- awareness.

4.1.1 Trauma of Social Exclusion

One of the earliest traumatic experiences occurs when Madame reacts fearfully to the students. Kathy recalls:

"She was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 29).

This moment represents a traumatic confrontation with social reality. The clones suddenly realise that, despite living among humans, they are perceived as fundamentally different. The comparison to spiders symbolises dehumanisation and social stigma. According to Caruth (1996), trauma emerges when an individual encounters a reality too overwhelming to process immediately. Madame's reaction becomes a lasting psychological wound that shapes Kathy's understanding of herself.

4.1.2 Trauma of Predetermined Fate

Another major source of trauma is the clones' awareness that they are destined to become organ donors. Tommy recalls Miss Lucy discussing:

"What's going to happen to us one day? Donations and all that" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 25).

This statement reveals the hidden anxiety surrounding their future. Unlike ordinary individuals, the clones cannot imagine careers, families, or personal aspirations. Their lives are controlled by a biological purpose imposed upon them from birth. This awareness produces existential trauma because they understand that death is not merely possible but inevitable.

Table 4.2

Types of Trauma Experienced by the Clones

Type of Trauma	Character	Evidence	Effect
Existential Trauma	Kathy	Knowledge of future donations	Anxiety and resignation

Social Trauma	Kathy, Ruth, Tommy	Madame's fear	Feelings of inferiority
Emotional Trauma	Tommy	Bullying and exclusion	Anger and temper outbursts
Psychological Trauma	All clones	Lack of autonomy	Identity fragmentation

4.1.3 Trauma Through Bullying and Marginalisation

Tommy's childhood experiences illustrate another form of trauma. Kathy observes:

"Tommy had been going through what he'd been going through not just for weeks or months, but for years" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 17).

The prolonged bullying and exclusion Tommy experiences create deep psychological scars. He becomes isolated from his peers and develops frequent temper tantrums. Trauma Theory suggests that repeated humiliation can have long-term effects on self-esteem and emotional stability. Tommy's behaviour reflects the consequences of sustained social rejection.

4.1.4 Trauma and Memory

The narrative itself demonstrates the relationship between trauma and memory. Kathy repeatedly revisits painful moments from Hailsham because traumatic experiences remain unresolved. At the beginning of Chapter Four, she states that she has an urge to:

"stop and think and remember" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 30).

Her narration reflects what Caruth (1996) describes as the return of traumatic memory. Kathy's recollections are not simply nostalgic; they represent an effort to understand experiences that continue to shape her identity.

Table 4.3

Trauma, Memory, and Identity

Trauma Event	Memory Response	Identity Effect
Madame's fear	Repeated recollection	Awareness of otherness
Knowledge of donations	Reflection on the future	Posthuman identity
Tommy's bullying	Narrative reconstruction	Emotional development
Ruth's donations and decline	Remembrance and grief	Identity through loss

The trauma experienced by Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth is multidimensional, encompassing social, psychological, and existential forms of suffering. Their traumatic experiences arise from dehumanisation, institutional control, bullying, and the certainty of premature death. Through memories of these experiences, the characters attempt to preserve a sense of identity in a world that denies their

humanity. From a posthumanist perspective, trauma becomes a crucial force in shaping the clones' understanding of themselves and their place within society.

4.2 Memory Analysis in *Never Let Me Go*

Memory is the central narrative device in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. The entire novel is narrated through Kathy H.'s recollections of her childhood at Hailsham, her relationships with Ruth and Tommy, and her later experiences as a carer. Through memory, Kathy reconstructs the past, preserves her identity, and attempts to make sense of the trauma associated with being a clone. Jan Assmann's (2011) theory of memory suggests that memories create continuity between past and present and play a vital role in the construction of identity. In *Never Let Me Go*, memory functions as a means of self-preservation, resistance, and identity formation.

Table 4.4
Functions of Memory in the Novel

Function	of Textual Evidence	Page	Significance
Memory			
Reconstruction of the Past	"I've been getting this urge to order all these old memories."	p. 30	Kathy reconstructs her life through memory.
Identity Formation	"Stop and think and remember."	p. 30	Memory helps Kathy maintain her sense of self.
Understanding Experience	"I want first to go over these earlier memories quite carefully."	p. 30	Memory enables reflection on past events.
Preservation of Relationships	Recollections of Tommy and Ruth	Throughout novel	Memory preserves emotional bonds.

4.2.1 Memory as Reconstruction of the Past

At the beginning of Chapter Four, Kathy explicitly reveals the importance of memory: "I've been getting this urge to order all these old memories" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 30). This statement establishes memory as the foundation of the narrative. Kathy's recollections are not random events but carefully reconstructed experiences that help her understand her life. Her memories function as a personal archive through which she preserves her past.

4.2.2 Memory as Reflection

Kathy further states:

"To stop and think and remember" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 30).

This quotation highlights the reflective nature of memory. Kathy revisits her experiences not merely to recall them but to interpret their significance. Through reflection, she gains a deeper understanding of her relationships and her identity as a clone.

4.2.3 Memory and the Search for Meaning

Another important memory-related statement occurs when Kathy explains:

"I want first to go over these earlier memories quite carefully" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 30). This demonstrates that memory serves as a tool for meaning-making. Kathy believes that understanding her present requires revisiting her past. The careful examination of memories enables her to connect childhood experiences with later events.

4.2.4 Memory and Identity

Reflecting upon her experiences, Kathy remarks:

"Thinking back now" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 29).

This phrase illustrates how identity is shaped through retrospective understanding. Kathy's adult perspective allows her to reinterpret experiences that she could not fully understand as a child. Memory thus becomes a mechanism through which identity evolves.

Table 4.5

Memory and Identity Formation

Memory Episode	Identity Outcome
Memories of Hailsham	Sense of belonging
Memories of Madame	Awareness of otherness
Memories of Tommy	Emotional attachment
Memories of Ruth	Understanding of friendship and loss
Memories of Donations	Acceptance of clone identity

4.2.5 Memory and Emotional Attachment

Kathy repeatedly returns to memories involving Tommy and Ruth. She notes:

"What occurred later came out of our time at Hailsham" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 30).

This quotation reveals that memory links the past and the present. Kathy understands her adult relationships through memories of childhood experiences. The emotional significance of Hailsham continues to shape her identity long after she leaves it.

4.2.6 Memory and Collective Experience

While discussing the encounter with Madame, Kathy observes:

"We were just at that age when we knew a few things about ourselves" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 29).

This memory is not solely personal but collective. It reflects a shared realisation among the clones regarding their difference from ordinary humans. Such collective memories contribute to the formation of a communal identity.

4.2.7 Memory and Self-Recognition

One of the most powerful reflections in the novel is Kathy's description of self-awareness:

"It's like walking past a mirror you've walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 29).

This metaphor demonstrates how memory can transform self-understanding. The remembered encounter with Madame forces the clones to see themselves differently, resulting in a new awareness of their social position and identity.

Table 4.6
Major Memory Themes in *Never Let Me Go*

Theme	Quotation	Interpretation
Remembering the Past	"I've been getting this urge to order all these old memories."	Memory reconstructs experience.
Reflection	"To stop and think and remember."	Memory enables interpretation.
Meaning-Making	"Go over these earlier memories quite carefully."	Memory creates understanding.
Identity	"Thinking back now."	Memory shapes selfhood.
Relationships	"What occurred later came out of our time at Hailsham."	Memory preserves emotional bonds.
Collective Memory	"We knew a few things about ourselves."	Shared memory creates group identity.
Self-Recognition	"Like walking past a mirror..."	Memory transforms self-perception.

Memory functions as the foundation of *Never Let Me Go*. Through her recollections, Kathy reconstructs her past, preserves relationships, and develops a coherent sense of identity. The novel demonstrates that memory is not merely a record of events but an active process through which individuals interpret experience and define themselves. From the perspective of Assmann's (2011) Memory Theory, Kathy's narrative illustrates how personal and collective memories contribute to identity formation and resistance against dehumanisation. For the clones, memory becomes the primary means of affirming their humanity in a society that denies their worth.

4.3 Identity Analysis Through a Posthumanist Lens

Identity is one of the most significant themes in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. Through a posthumanist perspective, the novel challenges traditional humanist assumptions that identity is determined by biological origin, autonomy, or social status. Instead, Ishiguro presents cloned individuals who possess emotions, memories, desires, and moral consciousness similar to those of ordinary humans. Despite this, they are denied recognition as fully human beings. Drawing upon the posthumanist theories of Hayles (1999) and Braidotti (2013), this analysis examines how Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth construct identities within a system that objectifies their bodies and reduces them to biological resources.

Table 4.7
Identity Formation Through a Posthumanist Lens

Character	Identity Challenge	Evidence	Posthumanist Interpretation
Kathy	Search for selfhood	for Reconstructs life through memory	Identity is constructed through experience rather than biology
Tommy	Struggle for recognition	for Belief in the Gallery theory	Desire to prove individuality
Ruth	Social insecurity	Creates imagined identities	Identity as performance

All Clones	Dehumanization	Organ donation system	Challenge to human/nonhuman boundaries
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4.3.1 Identity and Difference

One of the earliest moments of identity awareness occurs during the encounter with Madame. Kathy reflects:

"You realise that you really are different to them" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 29).

This realisation marks the beginning of identity formation. The clones recognise that society views them as fundamentally different from ordinary humans. According to Hayles (1999), posthuman identity emerges when traditional definitions of humanity become unstable. Kathy's awareness of difference initiates her understanding of herself as a posthuman subject.

Kathy further explains:

"There are people out there, like Madame, who don't hate you or wish you any harm" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 29).

This quotation demonstrates that discrimination against clones is institutional rather than personal. Their exclusion is rooted in their status as manufactured beings.

Another revealing statement occurs when Kathy observes:

"They nevertheless shudder at the very thought of you" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 29).

The clones become conscious that their identities are socially constructed as "other." This mirrors Braidotti's (2013) argument that posthuman subjects occupy marginalised positions within dominant social structures.

4.3.2 Identity and Dehumanisation

Madame's reaction represents one of the most powerful moments of identity crisis in the novel:

"She was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 29).

The comparison to spiders symbolises dehumanisation. Although the clones possess human consciousness, they are perceived as something less than human. Their identities are therefore shaped through exclusion and objectification.

Kathy recalls:

"Being seen like that, being the spiders" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 29).

This moment illustrates how the gaze of others influences identity. The clones begin to internalise society's perception of them, creating a fragmented sense of self.

Table 4.9

4.3.3 Posthuman Identity Markers in the Novel

Identity Marker	Textual Evidence	Meaning
Otherness	"Different to them"	Separation from humanity
Dehumanization	"Afraid of us"	Social exclusion
Objectification	Organ donor status	Body valued over self
Emotional Capacity	Love and friendship	Human-like subjectivity
Memory	Kathy's narration	Preservation of selfhood

4.3.4 Identity and Self-Recognition

One of the most important metaphors for identity appears when Kathy states:

"The first time you glimpse yourself through the eyes of a person like that" (Ishiguro,

2005, p. 29).

The quotation highlights the role of social perception in identity construction. Kathy's self-understanding changes as she begins to view herself from outsiders' perspectives. She continues:

"It's a cold moment" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 29).

This statement reflects the emotional shock accompanying identity realisation. The recognition that society does not regard them as fully human creates psychological distress.

Another significant passage states:

"It's like walking past a mirror you've walked past every day of your life" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 29). The mirror metaphor symbolises self-discovery. Identity is not fixed but emerges through reflection and social interaction.

Kathy adds: "Suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 29). This quotation demonstrates the instability of identity. The clones discover that their self-image differs dramatically from society's perception of them.

4.3.5 Identity and Memory

Kathy's identity is largely constructed through memory. She states:

"I've been getting this urge to order all these old memories" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 30).

The act of remembering enables Kathy to maintain a coherent identity despite the institutional forces that seek to reduce her to a biological object.

She further explains:

"What occurred later came out of our time at Hailsham" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 30).

This quotation demonstrates that identity develops through lived experiences rather than biological origins. Kathy's memories provide continuity between past and present, allowing her to preserve a sense of self.

Table 4.10

Identity Construction in *Never Let Me Go*

Source of Identity	Example	Posthuman Significance
Memory	Kathy's recollections	Maintains selfhood
Relationships	Tommy and Ruth	Identity through emotional bonds
Social Recognition	Madame's reaction	Awareness of otherness
Trauma	Knowledge of donations	Shapes self-perception
Reflection	Mirror metaphor	Self-discovery
Experience	Hailsham memories	Identity beyond biology

4.3.6 Identity Beyond Biology

A central argument of posthumanism is that identity should not be determined solely by biological origin. The clones in *Never Let Me Go* challenge this assumption by demonstrating love, friendship, creativity, memory, and moral awareness. Although society defines them by their biological function as organ donors, their experiences reveal that humanity is rooted in consciousness and emotional life rather than in genetic uniqueness.

Hayles (1999) argues that posthuman subjects emerge when traditional boundaries between human and nonhuman become unstable. Similarly, Braidotti (2013) suggests that identity is relational and continually evolving. Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth

exemplify these ideas because their identities are formed through memories, relationships, and experiences rather than biological status.

5. Findings

The findings of this study reveal that trauma, memory, and identity are deeply interconnected in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and collectively contribute to the construction of posthuman subjectivity. The analysis demonstrates that the cloned characters experience multiple forms of trauma, including psychological, social, and existential trauma. Their awareness of their predetermined fate as organ donors generates persistent feelings of fear, uncertainty, loss, and emotional suffering. The encounter with Madame serves as a significant traumatic moment, as it exposes the clones to the reality of their social exclusion and dehumanised status. These experiences support Caruth's (1996) assertion that trauma shapes individual consciousness and continues to influence identity formation through memory.

The study further finds that memory functions as a crucial mechanism for preserving identity. Kathy's narrative is structured around recollections of Hailsham, Tommy, and Ruth, demonstrating how memory creates continuity between past and present experiences. Through remembering, Kathy reconstructs her personal history and resists the institutional forces that seek to reduce her existence to biological utility. The findings support Assmann's (2011) view that memory plays a fundamental role in maintaining selfhood and preserving personal meaning. Memory is, therefore, not merely a narrative technique but a form of psychological survival and resistance against dehumanisation.

The posthumanist analysis reveals that identity in the novel is not determined by biological origin but by emotional experience, consciousness, relationships, and memory. Although the clones are genetically engineered beings, they display qualities traditionally associated with humanity, including love, empathy, creativity, moral awareness, and self-reflection. The findings indicate that Ishiguro challenges conventional humanist assumptions by presenting clones whose humanity is denied despite their human-like subjectivity. This supports the arguments of Hayles (1999) and Braidotti (2013) that posthuman identity is fluid, relational, and constructed through lived experiences rather than biological uniqueness.

Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that social institutions play a significant role in shaping identity. Hailsham and the organ donation system condition the clones to accept their predetermined roles, resulting in fragmented and unstable identities. Nevertheless, the characters continually attempt to assert individuality through friendships, memories, artistic expression, and emotional attachments. These acts of self-definition function as forms of resistance against systems of control and objectification.

The findings suggest that trauma generates the emotional conditions through which identity is questioned, and memory provides the means for reconstructing and preserving selfhood. Posthuman identity emerges through the interaction of these experiences. The study concludes that *Never Let Me Go* critiques technological exploitation and social dehumanisation while simultaneously redefining humanity through memory, emotional experience, and ethical relationships. Consequently, Ishiguro presents a posthuman vision in which humanity is determined not by biological status but by consciousness, memory, and the capacity for meaningful

relationships.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the themes of trauma, memory, and identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* through a posthumanist perspective. The analysis revealed that trauma is a defining aspect of the cloned characters' lives, emerging from their social marginalisation, predetermined fate, and institutional exploitation. The study found that traumatic experiences significantly influence the psychological development of Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, shaping their understanding of themselves and their place in society.

The findings also demonstrated that memory serves as a crucial mechanism for preserving identity. Through Kathy's recollections, the novel illustrates how memory enables individuals to maintain continuity between past and present experiences while resisting forces of dehumanisation. Memory functions not only as a narrative device but also as a means of self-preservation, allowing the clones to affirm their humanity despite being treated as biological commodities.

Furthermore, the posthumanist analysis showed that identity in the novel is constructed through emotional experiences, relationships, consciousness, and memory rather than biological origin. Ishiguro challenges traditional humanist assumptions by presenting cloned individuals who possess characteristics commonly associated with humanity yet are denied human status. The study concludes that *Never Let Me Go* critiques technological exploitation and social inequality while proposing a broader understanding of humanity based on ethical relationships, emotional depth, and subjective experience. Ultimately, trauma, memory, and identity are revealed as interconnected forces that shape posthuman subjectivity in the novel.

6.1 Future Recommendations

Future researchers may examine *Never Let Me Go* from other theoretical perspectives, such as biopolitics, transhumanism, ecocriticism, psychoanalysis, or feminist posthumanism, to provide further insights into the novel's complex representation of humanity and technology. Comparative studies may also be conducted between *Never Let Me Go* and other contemporary dystopian or science-fiction novels that address cloning, artificial intelligence, and posthuman identity. Additionally, scholars may explore the relationship between memory, ethics, and technological advancement in Ishiguro's broader body of work to enhance understanding of posthuman subjectivity in contemporary literature.

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