

# Ecocritical Biopolitics and the Ethics of Organ Harvesting in *Never Let Me Go*

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## Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* offers a subtle but profound critique of how life, bodies, and environments are managed under modern systems of power. While prior scholarship often examines posthumanist or bioethical dimensions, this study interprets the novel through **ecocritical and biopolitical frameworks**, highlighting how clones' lives unfold within carefully controlled landscapes that reflect both environmental and social governance. Drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of biopower, Giorgio Agamben's concept of bare life, and contemporary ecocritical theory on slow violence and the Anthropocene, I argue that Ishiguro portrays managed environments—Hailsham, the Cottages, and donation centers—as mechanisms that normalize organ extraction while masking structural violence. The ethical tension of the novel lies in its illustration of how life, whether human or ecological, can be rendered a disposable resource under the guise of stewardship. Ultimately, Ishiguro's work prompts reflection on the intersections between ecological management, bodily autonomy, and systemic exploitation.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism; Biopolitics; Kazuo Ishiguro; Organ Harvesting; Slow Violence; Anthropocene

## Introduction

*Never Let Me Go* (Ishiguro, 2005) traces the lives of clones raised to become organ donors. While the narrative's quiet tone and nostalgic lens emphasize memory and emotional connections, these literary choices mask a meticulously structured system of control over both bodies and spaces. Traditional readings of the novel focus on bioethics, identity, or posthumanist themes (Bradshaw, 2012; Cavallaro, 2015), but an **ecocritical-biopolitical approach** reveals how the environments themselves—spatial, pastoral, and institutional—act as instruments of governance, shaping subjectivity and conditioning compliance.

This paper examines how Ishiguro's depiction of landscapes serves both to manage clones and to normalize extraction. By analyzing Hailsham, the Cottages, and the donation centers as ecological and institutional apparatuses, I argue that the novel critiques systems that treat life—human and environmental alike—as a resource to be optimized.

## Theoretical Framework

### Biopolitics and Bare Life

Foucault (1978, 1990) describes biopolitics as the techniques by which modern societies regulate populations, health, and bodies. Clones at Hailsham exemplify biopower: their growth, education, and health are monitored, and their bodies are programmed for productivity.

Agamben's (1998) notion of **bare life** emphasizes those whose biological existence is maintained but whose political and social agency is excluded. Ishiguro's clones occupy this space: biologically human but stripped of societal rights, existing primarily as biological capital.

## **Ecocriticism and Slow Violence**

Ecocriticism examines how literature portrays human-environment relations and the consequences of ecological degradation (Buell, 1995). Nixon (2011) introduces the concept of slow violence to describe structural harm that accumulates gradually, often invisibly. Ishiguro's novel mirrors this concept: the clones experience harm that is systemic, bureaucratic, and normalized. The pastoral settings and institutional spaces are not neutral; they manage the clones' perceptions, desires, and acceptance of their roles, analogous to how environmental policies can shape ecosystems for human utility.

## **Hailsham: Constructed Pastoral Space**

Hailsham is depicted as idyllic, echoing classical pastoral imagery. However, the environment is intentionally curated to shape clones' behavior. Fields, art projects, and outdoor spaces function less as natural freedom than as disciplinary tools, integrating surveillance with pastoral aesthetics.

Art and creativity serve as indicators of the clones' inner qualities, but they are also mechanisms to validate them as suitable for the extraction system. Hailsham's carefully maintained landscape illustrates how pastoral environments can serve governance functions, training subjects to internalize norms and accept disposability.

## **The Cottages: Transitional Governance and Spatial Regulation**

The Cottages offer a semblance of autonomy, with open lawns and communal spaces fostering social interaction. Yet this freedom is carefully monitored and structured, guiding clones toward acceptance of their fates. The Cottages exemplify transitional ecologies: spaces that appear less regulated but subtly reinforce compliance and self-discipline. Environmental design here parallels controlled ecosystems in ecological governance, shaping behaviors while creating the illusion of liberty.

## **Donation Centers: Sterile Extraction and Environmental Logic**

Donation centers mark the culmination of ecological and biopolitical control. These sterile, highly organized spaces reduce clones to biological resources, highlighting their instrumental value. The environment mirrors industrialized or extractive landscapes: efficiency and productivity are prioritized over autonomy or dignity.

Ishiguro's depiction aligns with ecocritical concerns: just as ecosystems may be exploited under the pretext of management or sustainability, human bodies can be subjected to normalized extraction. The novel's ethical force derives from the quietness of this violence, showing how structures of care can simultaneously justify disposability.

## **Discussion: Slow Violence, Affect, and Ethics**

The clones' experience embodies Nixon's (2011) slow violence: harm is incremental, bureaucratic, and emotionally mediated. The narrative tone—nostalgic and reflective—reduces shock but deepens ethical engagement, encouraging readers to recognize systemic exploitation.

The parallels between environmental management and biopolitical control illuminate the ethical stakes of Ishiguro's world: both ecosystems and bodies are treated as renewable, commodified resources. The novel challenges readers to interrogate the systems that normalize disposability, whether in ecological or social domains.

## **Conclusion**

*Never Let Me Go* demonstrates the intersection of ecocriticism and biopolitics, revealing how landscapes, institutions, and bodies are shaped by governance systems that normalize extraction and disposability. Ishiguro critiques the subtle mechanisms of modern power, showing that environments and human life are often managed for utility rather than intrinsic value. The novel serves as a cautionary reflection on contemporary social and ecological management, emphasizing ethical responsibility toward both human and environmental systems.

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