

**Disorientating the Readers: Challenge to Our Limits of Empathy  
in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go***

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**Abstract**

The debate on whether novels can train readers into becoming more empathetic and altruistic individuals has continued for centuries. Although it has remained unresolved whether the society can receive ethical yields from novel reading, scholars generally agree that readers do bring empathy to the fictional world they engage themselves in. Kazuo Ishiguro's sixth novel, *Never Let Me Go* (2005), is an unconventional novel in the sense that it does not seek to evoke readers' empathy, but rather the opposite. The novel tells the tale of a group of clones, whose lives serve only the purpose of donating organs to other human beings. Inarguably, there is an acute sense of futility and passivity prevalent throughout the novel. The possibility of the characters having an alternative path in life is faint, and with all the characters quietly accepting their fated demise, that poignant sense of powerlessness remains unchanged even at the end of the novel, where the author could have given readers a twist of hope. Yet, what strikes us readers is that as we read through the novel, we are constantly confronted with the difficulty to empathize with these human clones despite their agonies. This paper aims to argue that by adopting a narrative technique that disorientates the readers, Ishiguro seems to have disrupted us from identifying with the characters and thus, poses a challenge to our extent of empathy towards those whom we see as less human.

**Reflection**

Why is reading literature important? What effects does reading have on readers and the society as a whole? As a literary student, these are questions that I constantly ask myself. My four years of education as an English major did not only transform me into a more eloquent speaker and writer, but also taught me to become appreciative of the power of literature, which laid the foundation for my capstone project. By analysing Ishiguro's work in depth and building constructive arguments, I found myself on a journey to

question my own humanity. This experience of self-reflection had again strengthened my belief that while literature can be a means to entertain, it can also serve as a gateway to intellectual enlightenment. It is truly rewarding to have this project as a conclusion to my studies as an English major.