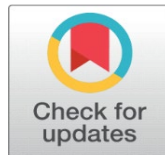
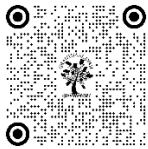


KAZUO ISHIGURO'S NEVER LET ME GO: AN ANALYSIS THROUGH THE LENS OF PLACE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* through the lens of spatial theory, examining how the construction and perception of place shape the novel's exploration of identity, memory, and human relationships. Drawing on Yi-Fu Tuan's concepts of space and place and Edward Relph's theory of place authenticity, the study investigates how key locations—such as Hailsham, the Cottages, and the recovery centers—function as more than mere settings, instead serving as active participants in the characters' emotional and existential journeys. The paper argues that these spaces embody the tensions between belonging and alienation, safety and confinement, and the known and the unknowable. By analyzing how the characters' sense of self is tied to their spatial experiences, this study sheds light on the broader implications of place in the novel, particularly in relation to themes of societal control, personal agency, and the inevitability of loss. Ultimately, the research highlights Ishiguro's nuanced portrayal of place as a medium through which human connections and existential truths are both forged and fractured.

Keywords: Place, Space, Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph



1. INTRODUCTION

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) is a story of the lives of clones. This is a novel about systematic control and the complex depletion of identity that results. It is a touching exploration of identity, memory, and mortality, intricately bound to the concept of place. In the novel, places such as Hailsham, the Cottages, and the donor centers serve as more than physical settings; they are arenas for the formation of identity and the negotiation of meaning. Using Edward Relph's theories on "insideness" and "outsideness" and Yi-Fu Tuan's exploration of space and place, this paper examines how Ishiguro constructs these places to shape and reflect the characters' lived experiences, emotional states, and existential trajectories.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: RELPH AND TUAN ON PLACE

Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness* (1976) provides a framework for understanding the subjective and social meanings of place. Relph distinguishes between "insideness," where one feels deeply connected to a place, and "outsideness," characterized by detachment or alienation. This dynamic is central to *Never Let Me Go*, as the characters navigate places that evoke both belonging and disconnection.

Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* complements this by examining how space becomes place through human experience and meaning-making. According to Tuan, places acquire significance through emotional attachment, memory, and lived experience, while spaces, by contrast, and remain abstract and undefined. These theories help illuminate how the settings in *Never Let Me Go* function as sites of identity formation and existential reflection.

3. DISCUSSION

HAILSHAM: A PLACE OF BELONGING AND DECEPTION

Hailsham, the fictional boarding school in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, is a complex site of both belonging and deception. Its duality lies in its role as a seemingly idyllic heaven for the clones while concealing the darker truth about their existence. It represents a place of apparent comfort and belonging for Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth. Hailsham functions as a home for the clones, fostering a sense of community and emotional attachment among the students. The institution provides an environment that mimics a nurturing upbringing, complete with art classes, mentorship, and social interactions. This carefully curated sense of belonging is critical in shaping the characters' understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

Using Yi-Fu Tuan's concept of *topophilia* (the affective bond between people and place), Hailsham can be viewed as a site where the students form strong emotional ties. For Kathy, the narrator, her memories of Hailsham are tinged with nostalgia, reinforcing its role as a place of comfort and identity. The rituals, the friendships, and even the physical environment—like the pond and sports pavilion—serve to anchor the students in a shared experience of home.

Relph's concept of "existential insideness" is apparent here, as the students view Hailsham as their home, a space imbued with safety and routine. The pastoral landscape, the art-focused curriculum, and communal rituals like the Exchanges create a sense of stability. This emotional attachment is evident in Kathy's conversation with Laura at the news of closing of Hailsham :

It was that exchange when we finally mentioned the closing of Hailsham, that suddenly brought us close again, and we hugged, quite spontaneously, not so much to comfort one another, but as a way of affirming Hailsham, the fact that it was still there in both our memories...(*Never Let Me Go*, 207)

However, Hailsham is also a place of manipulation, hiding the darker truth of the students' existence. From Relph's outsider perspective, Hailsham is an institutionalized mechanism of control. The guardians withhold the full truth from the students, cloaking the grim reality in euphemistic language and deliberate omissions. The students' idyllic upbringing is an illusion, intended to create individuals who will accept their fate without rebellion. Miss Lucy's eventual breakdown, where she tells the students they are not like others and will never have "normal" futures, starkly contrasts with the serene image of Hailsham. This moment unveils the tension between the school's nurturing appearance and its role in perpetuating their exploitation.

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're not like the actors you watch on your videos, you're not even like me. You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them , have been decided. (*Never Let Me Go*, 80)

Here we can use Tuan's distinction between space and place. While Hailsham is meaningful to the students as a place, but its societal function renders it a dehumanized space in the broader context.

4. THE COTTAGES: A LIMINAL PLACE

The Cottages serve as a transitional space, where the characters shift from the structured life of Hailsham to an ambiguous adulthood. The Cottages lack the structured routines and guidance of Hailsham, leaving the students to navigate this new environment largely on their own. Relph's notion of "existential outsidership" manifests in the characters' sense of displacement. The Cottages are physically remote and emotionally detached, lacking the institutional structure and familiarity of Hailsham.. This space challenges their previous assumptions about identity and purpose. The characters' exploration of relationships and independence, such as Ruth's attempts to imitate the behavior of older residents, reflects their struggle to find meaning and adapt to life outside Hailsham.

It is observed that the structured and nurturing ideals of Hailsham begin to break down at the Cottages. The students encounter a new reality where creativity and hope no longer serve a higher purpose but are stripped of their protective facade. This marks a shift from innocence to awareness. Here we can cite the example of the deterioration of relationships

among Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy at the Cottages symbolizes the growing realization of their mortality and the limitations of their dreams. For Kathy, the Cottages evoke a sense of unease and self-consciousness. The students attempt to imitate behaviors they associate with adulthood—Ruth’s adoption of affectations or Tommy’s exploration of creativity—but these performances underscore their separation from the “normal” world. As Kathy observes:

Tuan’s assertion that places gain significance through shared experience and emotional resonance highlights the Cottages’ ambiguity. Unlike Hailsham, the Cottages fail to provide a sense of community or purpose, leaving the characters in a liminal state between belonging and alienation.

At the Cottages, the students gradually come to terms with the reality of their existence as clones. Encounters with the outside world and interactions with the veterans reveal their limited agency and societal alienation. Ruth’s fixation on finding her “possible” (the person she was cloned from) reflects the clones’ desire to connect with a sense of identity and history, only to realize the futility of this quest.

The liminality of the Cottages is also reflected in their physical and emotional setting. Isolated and somewhat rundown, the Cottages exist in a space that is neither entirely safe nor overtly threatening. They symbolize a threshold where the characters must confront their individuality and their collective destiny. For example, Kathy’s growing introspection during her time at the Cottages mirrors the space’s liminality. Her role as a narrator becomes more reflective, signifying her transition toward accepting her fate.

5. THE DONOR CENTERS: SPACES OF ALIENATION AND ACCEPTANCE

The donor centers, where the characters spend their final days, represent places of profound alienation. Sterile and impersonal, these centers strip the characters of individuality, reducing them to their biological purpose.

Tuan refers Space as abstract, undefined expanses, while **place** becomes meaningful through human experience, attachment, and memory. The donor centers, while physically defined locations, lack the meaningful, personal connections that could make them places for the clones. Instead, they remain alienating and depersonalized spaces. Kathy’s description of the donor centers emphasizes their clinical sterility and detachment. The lack of individuality in these spaces contrasts with Hailsham, which was imbued with personal memories and attachments.

Relph defines **placelessness** as spaces stripped of uniqueness and human connection, often dominated by uniformity and functionality. The donor centers embody this concept, designed solely for efficiency in harvesting organs. Relph’s “outsideness” is also pervasive as the centers lack the emotional connection or identity that transform spaces into meaningful places. The sameness of the donor centers, regardless of location, reinforces the clones’ dehumanization. Kathy’s experiences as a carer reveal how the centers lack any defining characteristics, serving only as transition points to “completion.” Kathy describes the donors becoming withdrawn and detached as they approach completion, emphasizing the centers’ inability to foster personal or communal bonds.

The donor centers are places where individuality and personal connection diminish. Kathy notices how donors retreat inward, disconnected from others and their surroundings. Tommy’s final moments at the center highlight the loneliness and inevitability associated with the space. Kathy’s quiet resignation amplifies the sterile, unfeeling atmosphere of the centers.

Hailsham, filled with personal memories, is the epitome of a “place” for the clones, while the donor centers symbolize the loss of connection to meaningful spaces. Kathy frequently juxtaposes her time at the donor centers with memories of Hailsham, underscoring how Hailsham provided a sense of identity and grounding that the donor centers Kathy recalls Hailsham as a refuge of shared experiences.

The donor centers in *Never Let Me Go* epitomize the transition from meaningful places to impersonal spaces. Using Tuan’s and Relph’s theories, the centers are seen as sites of placelessness and alienation, devoid of emotional or symbolic resonance for the clones. This analysis deepens Ishiguro’s critique of a society that prioritizes utility over humanity, reducing individuals to mere functions in a system.

6. THE CONCEPT OF PLACE AS IDENTITY AND LOSS

In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro uses place to explore the intersection of identity, memory, and loss. Hailsham, the Cottages, and the donor centers are not merely physical locations; they are deeply intertwined with the characters’ emotional and existential journeys. These places reflect the clones’ shifting understanding of themselves and their world, from the insular comfort of Hailsham to the alienation of the donor centers.

By applying Relph's and Tuan's theoretical insights, it becomes clear that Ishiguro's treatment of place is central to the novel's exploration of what it means to be human. The characters' connections to place mirror their struggles with belonging, purpose, and mortality, offering a poignant commentary on the spaces we inhabit and the meanings we assign to them.

7. CONCLUSION

Through its evocative portrayal of Hailsham, the Cottages, and the donor centers, *Never Let Me Go* demonstrates the power of place in shaping human experience. Ishiguro uses these settings to interrogate the boundaries of identity and humanity, compelling readers to reflect on the ways in which place defines and confines us. Relph's and Tuan's theoretical frameworks illuminate the novel's nuanced depiction of place, revealing it as both a source of connection and a site of alienation. In *Never Let Me Go*, place is more than a backdrop; it is a central force in the characters' lives, a mirror of their hopes, fears, and ultimate acceptance of their fate.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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