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## SYMBOLISING NATURE VIA CLONES IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *NEVER LET ME GO*: AN ECOCRITICAL REASSESSMENT

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### Abstract

Sir Kazuo Ishiguro has portrayed the canvas of his literary oeuvre with vivacious colours of human life and nature. Through his novels and stories he not only covers the themes of human emotions and psyche but also of nature and biodiversity. In *Never Let Me Go* Ishiguro through human clones raises several ecological concerns which can be seen through the lenses of symbolism.

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### Keywords

Nature, Ecology, Symbolism, Clones

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*“We imagine we still live back on that old planet, that the disturbances we see around us are the old random and freakish kind. But they’re not. It’s a different place. A different planet. It needs a new name.”*

**- Bill Mckibben,**

*Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*

Nature, explicitly and inexplicitly has always been an integral part of several discourses and texts in the field of literature. Be it the plays of Shakespeare or the poetry of Wordsworth, it was always there, spreading its benevolence and beauty incessantly through the words of great authors and thinkers. With the time passing and advancements in the fields of science and technology nature has faced several blows to its prosperity. High rates of deforestation, extinction of several flora and fauna, climate change, global warming and ozone layer depletion have led to a grave discussion among the scholars and laymen in the scientific, political, and literary community. Bill Mckibben, an American environmentalist and writer who has been raising severe ecological concerns through his eminent works came up with the concept of *Eaarth* in his eponymous book published in 2010. We have entered from the stage of Holocene to Anthropocene. Anthropocene is an unofficial unit of geological time which focuses on the advent of human activities taking centre stage and impacting ecosystem and climatic conditions of the planet. The word Anthropocene is derived from two Greek words, *anthropo* (man) and *cene* (new), and it was first coined by biologist Eugene Storer and chemist Paul Crutzen in the year 2000.

According to Mckibben this Earth is no longer the Earth it was, it has witnessed many transitions due to which our planet does not contain the same essence and properties it used to have once. Humans have snatched the control from nature and thus have led the planet to a completely new era where climate change, abnormal raining, unprecedented conditions, forests burning in a massive amount, have become the new norm. Mckibben in his earlier book titled *The End of The Nature* has raised similar concerns about the disastrous

transformations this planet is going through. Nature has been exploited enough in various ways by humans. Several Flora and Fauna have gone extinct and more are at the verge of extinction, rat race of development is acting as a collateral damage to the planet. Mckibben witnessing changes on the planet due to such human centric approaches thus no longer recognises this celestial body we are a part of, with its current name Earth. He advocates for a new nomenclature of this planet, and he names it *Eaarth*, the old name with an extra 'a' which may be an acronym or symbol of Anthropocene in the current times.

*Never Let Me Go* is the sixth novel written by the Nobel Laureate Sir Kazuo Ishiguro in 2005 and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. Although the novel has been confined to the genres of sci-fi and dystopia, it also explores the various other dimensions and aspects of literature. One of the most pertinent themes that it touches with its splendid narration and description of human clones is the theme of humans and environment.

The human-nature relationship has always been a lucrative theme in literature. In poetry be it the romantics like Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley or the modernists like Eliot and Yeats or novelists and prose writers like Hemingway and Emerson, each and every one of them has dealt with this relation in their works. Following this lineage of ancient and modern writers, Ishiguro, a contemporary writer belonging to post-postmodern literature lights up the same torch with new flames through the use of symbolism (an artistic and literary movement started in latter half of nineteenth century where symbols and symbolised language is used for expressing and conveying a broader and abstract message by the artist/ writer) in his works.

The novel is set in England in late 1990s where Kathy, the narrator and the protagonist who is a thirty-one-year-old clone and has been working as a carer for eleven years describes the poignant tale of human clones artificially produced by humans for the purpose of organ donation. The story is an amalgamation of her childhood memories in Hailsham, her friendship with Tommy and Ruth, and incidents of her youth while working as a carer. Full of emotions where characters go on quest for self, the novel contains a high symbolism where clones

act as a symbol of nature in contemporary era. Like nature, clones are also not considered as humans or as living embodiment in the anthropocentric world. In the novel clones face a tragic end due to the whimsicalities of humans. In the real world it is nature that suffers.

The concept of donor and carer in the novel symbolises various qualities of nature. Although clones purport to be the provider to the medical needs of humans, still they are given some time to live and grow within the boundaries of a pre-set environmental condition in the form of schools like Hailsham. If seen from the lenses of symbolism, it can be observed that all these qualities and circumstances faced by these clones are also faced by nature itself in the contemporary era. For commercial and personal purposes several species are created in a controlled environment and are allowed to grow at a stage where they benefit the most, later, they are executed and used for the human benefit. Clones are also provided with a certain amount of break after an organ donation and they are sent to recovery centres so that they revive themselves after their period of convalescence. In the first chapter of the novel Kathy talks about recovery:

So I'm not trying to boast. But then I do know for a fact they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too. My donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as "agitated," even before fourth donation. (3)

Recovery symbolises the break between the acts of human exploitations of nature where in the greed of getting more and more from it. At the end these clones vanish or get disposed due to continuous donations which symbolises the slow exploitation of the natural resources, one day like clones, natural resources are going to vanish. Clones not only act as donors in their adult stage but they also act as a carer for themselves. It resembles the caring and healing attributes of nature through the lives of clones. Nature has the benevolent qualities; it heals itself if left alone from human interference. The recent pandemic has proven that less human intervention and widespread lockdowns of town hustle has led to significant improvements in ecological balance.

According to an article entitled *Positive environmental effects of the coronavirus 2020 episode: a review*:

COVID-19 has imparted many positive changes in the chemical composition of the environment worldwide. COVID-19 induced lockdowns have resulted in 20–77% reductions in emissions of nitrogen oxides, reducing by 16–60% in different cities. Emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> were also reduced between 5 and 10%. Similarly, the particulate matter level globally was found to reduce by 9–200%, and New Delhi, India, witnessed the highest levels of change ever seen. (Mousazadeh *et al.*)

Recovery of clones and recovery of nature, happen when there is no human intervention taking place. Recovering and then instantly being ready for donations to humans create a striking similarity between clones and nature that how both of them serve the sole purpose of providing to mankind without gaining anything in return.

Later in the novel, it was revealed that the purpose of schools like Hailsham was to show that the clones are also humans and they too contain a soul inside them. It was done through the Gallery or display of art made by these clones in Hailsham. In the third part of *Never Let Me Go* when Tommy and Kathy went to see Madame and the questioned about the purpose of gallery where the art pieces made by clones were taken away so they got this answer from Miss Emily:

You said it was because your art would reveal what you were like. What you were like inside. That's what you said, wasn't it? Well, you weren't far wrong about that. We took away your art because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to *prove you had souls at all.* (255)

This is similar to the experiment conducted by a great Physicist and Biologist J.C. Bose in the year 1901 at the Royal Society of London where he proved that plants like animals also contain life and respond to the stimulus same as any other living organism. His experiment was a pioneering one as the plants before this breakthrough were considered as devoid of life. The schools like Hailsham purported the same cause

but weren't successful. The regular exploitation of Nature where nature is considered as a soulless body is symbolised through this incident in the novel where clones donate their organs till clones are complete. This incident in the novel also creates a need for a much-needed ethical discourses regarding genetic engineering and process of cloning which will remain pertinent for a very long period. Although created artificially in a lab or a test tube, clones too are living organisms who also have a right to choose for their own and can't be considered as an exception from the other beings.

Clones at the end of the novel also indicate the perishable qualities of nature through one of the final conversations between Tommy and Kathy, where Tommy urges Kathy to give up being a carer. "But is it really that important?" Tommy asks Kathy, "Okay, it's really nice to have a good carer. But in the end, is it really so important? The donors will all donate, just the same, and then they'll complete." (276)

The noticeable use of the word 'complete' regarding the clones in the novel resembles the fulfilment of human desires by destructing nature and its biodiversity.

Ishiguro throughout the whole narration keeps reminding the readers that these are clones and they have a sole purpose in life and that is organ donation for human life's longevity. Some of such descriptions found in the novel can be seen below:

"Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as "agitated," even before fourth donation." (3), "What's going to happen to us one day. Donations and all that." (29), "...we perhaps even knew that a long way down the line there were donations waiting for us." (69), "They sorted it out so you could have a few years together before you began your donations." (151)

Through various major and minor characters and through bringing forward the incidents from carer phase of Kathy's life, Ishiguro keeps pointing towards their short-spanned existence or their predestined life:

"And sooner or later a donor doesn't make it, even though, say, it's only the second donation and no one

anticipated complications.” (203), “I’ll tell you something I heard. I heard about Chrissie. I heard she completed during her second donation.” (221), “Most donors at the Kingsfield get their own room after third donation, and Tommy was given one of the largest singles in the centre.” (233)

Death as a theme can also be witnessed here in the case of clones but unlike the unpredictable demise here clones’ end is predestined with a declared purpose of serving humans which makes them a greater symbol of nature and its resources as both of them perish for the human benefit.

Kathy’s reply to this question brings forward the munificent side of nature in front of the readers; “Of course it’s important. A good carer makes a big difference to what a donor’s life’s actually like.” (276)

Again, this answer by Kathy showcases the self-healing and caring attributes of nature. Here the donor and carer both the roles are played by the nature.

Ishiguro being one of the most adroit writers of the contemporary literary community by using his unique style and application of symbolism makes this particular work an important piece of his literary oeuvre. Clones act as an appropriate symbol of Nature and its rigorous exploitation by humans for their own welfare without giving a thought about the dangers due to this anthropocentric approach and ideology. An eco-critical rereading of *Never Let Me Go* through the glasses of symbolism makes the fictional anthropocentric world of this novel similar to the *Eaarth* of Mckibben where nature is played with the whimsicalities and greed of humans, where all the ethical concerns are ignored for the good of humans, not humanity. *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* a non-fiction of Bill Mckibben and *Never Let Me Go* where a fictional world is created by Kazuo Ishiguro, both come on the same scale as both of them become a concern raising text towards the excessive human interference and its harm towards nature. *Never Let Me Go* besides symbolising clones as natural beings also raises alarming propositions against the unethical scientific advancements and experiments conducted in the past and are still

ongoing where Earth becomes a conduit of strange and concerning transformations as, *Eaarth*. The novel is a catastrophic breach in the human bastion of controlling nature through a mindless pursuit of scientific and technological advancements.

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