
**A BAZANIAN EXPLORATION ON KAZUO ISHIGURO'S NEVER LET ME GO
BY DIRECTOR MARK ROMANEK**

Renugadevi.R¹

Student: II MA Eng. Lit¹

Email id : renuga735@gmail.com¹

Dr. B. Abirami²

Designation: Assistant Professor of English², College: Sri Ramakrishna College of Arts &
Science(Autonomous) Email id: abirami@srcas.ac.in².

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Abstract

This article presents a comparative analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* and its film adaptation, directed by Mark Romanek. Using André Bazin's "Theory of Adaptation: Novel to Film" as its theoretical foundation, the study explores the film's fidelity to the source material, the respect shown to the original narrative, and the ways cinematic techniques are used to enrich the story. By critically analyzing both the novel and the film, the research examines how the adaptation process reshapes the narrative and evaluates the extent to which the film reflects the novel's essence and thematic depth. The study aims to provide valuable insights into the intricate connections between literature and cinema.

Keywords: Characters, Film, Novel, Fidelity, Techniques

The novel *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro, is set in an alternate history of England in the 1990s. It follows the story of three friends, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy, who grow up together at Hailsham, a mysterious boarding school. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that Hailsham is not an ordinary school. The students are clones, created for the sole purpose of serving as organ donors for the wealthy and powerful. The novel explores themes of identity, mortality, love, and the human condition through the eyes of Kathy, who narrates the story. As Kathy reflects on her past, she reveals the deep bond between the three friends and the tragic fate that awaits them.

Mark Romanek directs the film adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*. The film, starring Carey Mulligan, Keira Knightley, and Saoirse Ronan, brings the

haunting and thought-provoking story to life on the big screen. Romanek's adaptation remains faithful to the original novel, capturing the essence of Ishiguro's exploration of identity, mortality, and humanity.

The film's atmospheric and introspective tone mirrors the novel's reflective narrative, immersing audiences in the world of Hailsham and the tragic fate of its students. Through the lens of Romanek's direction, the film adaptation becomes a critically acclaimed and emotionally resonant exploration of the human condition, cementing its place as a powerful and unforgettable cinematic experience.

André Bazin, a French film critic and theorist, proposes that film adaptations of novels should prioritize fidelity to the original narrative while also embracing the unique qualities of the cinematic medium. According to Bazin, the best adaptations are those that respect the novel's narrative structure and character development, utilize cinematic techniques to enhance the story and create a distinct visual identity, and avoid literal translations of the novel's language.

In his essay, *In Defence of Mixed Cinema*, he argues that fidelity as a virtue and that adaptation should be regarded as a form of translation from one medium to another: a good adaptation is the essence of the letter and the spirit. The filmmaker is regarded as a deliberate craftsman who requires all of his powers of invention to create a new structure different from but parallel to the original. A successful film adaptation, according to him, is neither a replication nor a substitute; it is re-experience in another medium (Ahmad Zaini 101).

By applying Bazin's theory, this study aims to explore how the film adaptation of *Never Let Me Go* navigates the complexities of adaptation and creates a unique cinematic experience that complements the original novel. Specifically, the study examines how Romanek's direction interprets Ishiguro's narrative and utilizes cinematic techniques to enhance the story. The study also investigates how the film adaptation balances fidelity to the original narrative with the unique qualities of the film medium. By analyzing the film's use of cinematic techniques, such as cinematography and sound design, the study provides insight into how the film adaptation creates a distinct visual identity that complements the original novel.

Bazin's theory of adaptation provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex relationship between literature and cinema. By applying this theory to the film adaptation of *Never Let Me Go*, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways in which film adaptations can enhance and transform the original narrative, while remaining faithful to its essence. The film adaptation of *Never Let Me Go* adheres closely to the novel's narrative structure, maintaining the same non-linear narrative and reflective tone. Director Mark Romanek skillfully interweaves the story's past and present, creating a cohesive and engaging narrative that mirrors the novel's complexity.

The film's use of flashbacks and flash-forwards effectively captures the novel's non-linear narrative, allowing the audience to piece together the characters' past and present. Romanek's direction ensures that the film's pacing is well-balanced, moving seamlessly between moments of introspection and action. One of the most notable aspects of the film's adherence to the novel's narrative structure is its use of Kathy H.'s narration.

The film maintains the novel's first-person narrative voice, allowing the audience to experience the story through Kathy's eyes. This narrative choice creates a sense of intimacy and immediacy, drawing the audience into the world of Hailsham and its characters. "There was bright sunshine, but it must have been raining earlier that day because I can remember how the sun was glinting on the muddy surface of the grass." (Ishiguro 7)

The film's adherence to the novel's narrative structure also extends to its portrayal of the characters. Romanek's direction brings the characters to life, capturing their complexities and nuances. The film's performances, particularly Carey Mulligan's portrayal of Kathy, are outstanding, conveying the characters' emotions and inner lives with depth and sensitivity.

The film adaptation utilizes visual elements to convey the novel's emotional depth, creating a poignant and thought-provoking cinematic experience. Director Mark Romanek skillfully employs cinematography, lighting, and production design to evoke the characters' emotions and inner lives. The film's use of muted colors and soft lighting effectively captures the melancholic tone of the novel, conveying the characters' sense of longing and loss. The cinematography is equally impressive, using close-ups and medium shots to create a sense of intimacy and immediacy.

One of the most striking visual elements in the film is the use of Hailsham's isolated and eerie landscapes. The film's production design expertly captures the school's sense of confinement and isolation, underscoring the characters' feelings of disconnection and

disillusionment. Romanek's direction also makes effective use of symbolism, incorporating visual motifs that reflect the characters' emotional states. For example, the film's use of flowers and trees serves as a poignant reminder of the characters' mortality and the transience of life.

The film's visual elements are also used to convey the characters' complex relationships and emotions. The cinematography captures the subtle nuances of the characters' interactions, revealing their deep-seated emotions and desires. The film adaptation demonstrates a masterful use of visual elements to convey the novel's emotional depth. Romanek's direction creates a powerful and moving cinematic experience, one that effectively captures the novel's themes of identity, mortality, and human connection.

Both the novel and the film achieve realism by portraying a world that closely resembles our own, despite its dystopian premise. The novel accomplishes this through Kathy's introspective first-person narration, gradually revealing the unsettling truth about the clones' existence. The film, however, relies on muted color tones and naturalistic performances to make the story's tragic inevitability more tangible. Faithfulness to the source material is evident in how the film retains the novel's core themes of love, loss, and the fragility of human life, even though some plot elements are condensed.

At the same time, the film employs creative expansion through its cinematography and at the same time, the film employs creative expansion through its cinematography and soundtrack, using lingering shots and melancholic music to evoke a sense of quiet despair beyond what words alone can convey. For example, in the final scene, Kathy stands in an empty field, gazing at the horizon (Romanek 1:35:34 - 1:35:59) a visual extension of the novel's ending that reinforces themes of resignation and longing in a way that the book expresses through internal monologue. This combination of realism, fidelity, and creative reinterpretation aligns with Bazin's vision of a meaningful adaptation.

The uses cinematography, color palette, and music to intensify its emotional depth, reinforcing the themes of nostalgia, loss, and inevitability. The cinematography relies on soft, lingering shots that emphasize the characters' quiet suffering and isolation. The use of natural lighting and close-ups captures intimate moments, making their emotions feel raw and personal. For example, in the scene where Kathy watches Tommy scream in frustration near the fence, the camera holds on her face, showing her restrained grief, making the moment more poignant (Romanek 1:31:40 - 1:32:03).

-muted color palette further enhances the film's melancholic tone. Shades of gray, pale blues, and faded greens dominate the visuals, reflecting the characters' bleak futures and the quiet, almost dreamlike atmosphere of their world. The colors subtly shift from warmer hues in the Hailsham scenes to colder, desaturated tones in adulthood, visually marking the transition from innocence to harsh reality.

Music plays an equally powerful role in evoking emotion. The film's score, composed by Rachel Portman, features soft piano and string arrangements that create a sense of longing and inevitability. The soundtrack is never overpowering, instead complementing the film's quiet, reflective nature. In the final scene, as Kathy stands in an open field, the gentle swell of music underscores her silent acceptance of her fate, allowing the audience to feel the weight of her emotions without the need for dialogue. Through cinematography, color, and music, the film transforms the novel's introspective sadness into a visually and sonically immersive experience, deepening the emotional impact of the story.

Both the novel and the film emphasize the quiet resignation of the clones as they come to terms with their purpose, capturing the same haunting melancholy that defines Ishiguro's story. The film maintains the subdued, reflective tone of the novel, ensuring that the emotional weight of the characters' experiences remains intact. However, while the novel relies on Kathy's introspective narration to explore memory and identity, the film conveys these themes visually, using lingering shots and expressive performances.

For example, in the novel, Kathy reflects on her memories of Hailsham with a deep sense of nostalgia, often questioning the reliability of her recollections. The film translates this by using soft, diffused lighting and dreamlike flashbacks to create a similar sense of wistful longing. While some details are condensed or altered for cinematic efficiency, the film successfully retains the novel's emotional depth, making it a faithful yet visually distinct interpretation of Ishiguro's work.

The adaptation of *Never Let Me Go* has both strengths and limitations in translating the novel's themes and emotions to the screen. One of its biggest strengths is its ability to visually enhance the novel's quiet sadness through cinematography, music, and performances. The film captures the emotional depth of the story without relying on excessive dialogue, using subtle expressions and atmospheric visuals to convey the characters' suppressed emotions. For instance, in the film, the moment Kathy listens to "Never Let Me Go" in her dorm room is just as powerful as in the novel, even without her internal monologue (Romanek 0:21:33 - 0:22:40).

The scene's soft lighting, close-up shots, and the heartbreaking expression on Carey Mulligan's face communicate the same deep longing and attachment to memory that the novel describes through Kathy's thoughts. However, the film also has limitations, particularly in its inability to fully replicate the novel's introspective depth. Ishiguro's writing is built on Kathy's reflective narration, which allows readers to experience her evolving understanding of her fate in a deeply personal way.

While the film remains faithful to the plot, it lacks the same level of internal exploration, making some of the characters' emotions feel more distant. For example, Tommy's breakdown near the end of the film is heartbreaking, but without the novel's detailed narration explaining his desperation, the full weight of his emotional realization feels slightly less profound. Despite these limitations, the adaptation successfully captures the core essence of the story, proving that cinema can offer a different yet equally meaningful interpretation of literature.

André Bazin's adaptation ideals by preserving the essence of the novel while utilizing the strengths of cinema to enhance its storytelling. Bazin argues that a successful adaptation should not merely copy a novel but should respect its themes while embracing the unique capabilities of film. The movie achieves this by maintaining the melancholic tone and existential themes of Ishiguro's novel while using visual storytelling to evoke emotions that words alone cannot fully capture.

Instead of relying on Kathy's introspective narration, as the novel does, the film uses cinematography, facial expressions, and music to convey the characters' quiet suffering. For instance, the film's final scene, where Kathy stands in an open field looking toward the horizon, visually expands on the novel's ending by emphasizing her isolation and resignation. This approach reflects Bazin's belief that cinema should not simply translate literature but should reinterpret it in a way that remains faithful to its spirit. While some of the novel's internal depth is inevitably lost, the film successfully embodies Bazin's philosophy by respecting the original work while transforming it into a deeply visual and emotional experience.

The comparative analysis of *Never Let Me Go* as a novel and film adaptation reveals that while both versions convey the same core themes of love, loss, memory, and fate, they do so using different storytelling techniques. The novel relies on Kathy's introspective narration, allowing readers to experience her emotions and reflections in a deeply personal way, while the film translates these feelings into visual and auditory elements, such as muted

colors, lingering shots, and melancholic music. The adaptation largely maintains the essence of Ishiguro's work, successfully preserving its subdued and haunting tone.

Applying André Bazin's adaptation theory, the film demonstrates a strong balance between faithfulness to the source material and creative expansion. It reflects Bazin's ideals by respecting the novel's themes while using cinematic techniques to enhance the emotional depth of the story. However, some limitations arise due to the loss of internal monologue, which slightly reduces the depth of character introspection. Despite these differences, the film remains a powerful and faithful interpretation, proving that adaptation is not just about replication but about transforming a story into a new artistic form while retaining its essence.

The relationship between literature and cinema is one of transformation rather than direct replication. While novels offer deep introspection and detailed inner monologues, films bring stories to life through visuals, sound, and performance. Both mediums have unique strengths; literature allows for deep personal engagement with a character's thoughts, while cinema creates an immediate emotional impact through imagery and atmosphere. A successful adaptation, like *Never Let Me Go*, proves that films do not need to copy every detail of a novel to capture its essence.

Instead, they can reimagine the story in a way that stays true to its themes while utilizing the power of visual storytelling. This balance between fidelity and creative interpretation highlights how literature and cinema complement each other, showing that the same story can resonate with audiences in different yet equally powerful ways.

Future research can explore how different adaptation theories apply to *Never Let Me Go* and similar literary works. While this study focuses on André Bazin's approach, other theories, such as Linda Hutcheon's "concept of adaptation as an act of reinterpretation," could provide new insights into how films reshape narratives. Additionally, further studies can examine how other Ishiguro adaptations, like *The Remains of the Day* or *Klara and the Sun*, compare in their translation from text to screen.

Another interesting direction is analyzing audience reception like how readers of the novel perceive the film versus those who experience the story for the first time through cinema. Finally, research could investigate how advancements in filmmaking, such as AI-generated visuals or virtual reality storytelling, might impact future adaptations of deeply introspective novels like *Never Let Me Go*.

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