

Comparative Study

Texts

- **Never Let Me Go** – Kazuo Ishiguro
- **Kindertransport** – Diane Samuels
- **The Shawshank Redemption** – Director: Frank Darabont

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A. Hero, Heroine, Villain

The hero, heroine or villain of a novel, play or film text is normally the main character in the text. ‘Heroes’ usually do things to help others. They often make major sacrifices, show generosity or stand up for what they believe in, even if it means they will face unpleasant consequences. However, heroes do not have to be perfect – they can have flaws. This is what makes them interesting characters. It is what helps us relate

to them. ‘Heroine’ is simply a female version of hero. ‘Villains’ are also known as ‘bad guys’. They usually stop the hero from getting what they want. They tend to have a negative effect on the other characters. The hero/heroines we will study are complex people. They each display a variety of characteristics. At times they contradict themselves. This makes studying them very interesting.

Never Let Me Go

Kathy H. is the heroine of the novel *Never Let Me Go*. Kathy narrates the story of her life from her earliest days at Hailsham, to her time at the Cottages, to her work as a carer, and finally to the beginning of her work as a donor. Kathy is in many ways a typical child growing up in 1970s England. She likes playing with friends, enjoys going to school and is very capable of getting up to mischief. However, we soon learn that Kathy and her friends are not like other children. They are clones who have been raised to donate vital organs to sick people. They live at Hailsham, a cross between a school and a hospital, and they are managed by the guardians. Kathy and her friends do not have parents. They cannot grow up and follow their dreams. Their lives have been mapped out for them. After Hailsham, they are sent to a residential home called the Cottages before they must begin their work. At first, their job is to care for people who have donated their organs. Later, though, they are the ones who must make donations. **As the narrator, Kathy offers readers a detailed view of her life as a clone. She displays a range of characteristics, many of which are positive. There are some negative ones too, though. These traits have a huge impact on her as a heroine, and on the plot itself.**

Kind

Kathy H. shows that she is a kind person from a young age. Kathy sees Tommy being bullied by a group of boys who leave him out of their football game. He throws a huge tantrum and this causes some of the girls watching the game to mock him even further. Kathy approaches Tommy and appeals to him to calm down. The bullying of Tommy continues long after this incident, however. Kathy appeals to her friends to help Tommy. In the dorm at night-time she tells her friends that the students ‘put weird things in his bed, a worm in his cereal...some cleaned a toilet with his toothbrush so it was waiting for him with shit all over the bristles’. But when she finishes making her points to her friends, there ‘was a funny sort of silence hanging in the dark’. Kathy’s best friend, Ruth, tells her that Tommy has ‘got to change his attitude’. **In other words, she suggests it is his own fault if he is bullied. Kathy takes the opposite view and risks being kind to Tommy, even if this might make her unpopular. This is one reason why Kathy is a heroine.**

Mean

There are moments in the novel when Kathy is a mean heroine and treats people very harshly, including her best friend, Ruth. The pair have

a complicated friendship at Hailsham, often appearing more like rivals than friends. Ruth cheekily tells Kathy and some other students that her fancy new pencil case was bought in a Sale. However, she winks at their group of friends in a way that makes them wonder if she is telling the truth. Kathy understands that Ruth ‘was claiming the pencil case was a gift from Miss Geraldine’. This annoys Kathy because she suspects Ruth is lying to her. She tries to prove that Ruth has not been telling the truth. She pretends to have checked the register (where all Sales are recorded) and claims to have seen ‘all the things people have bought’. In other words, she is claiming that she knows Ruth bought the pencil case herself. This leaves Ruth ‘at a complete loss for words’ and ‘on the verge of tears’. Ruth is aware that Kathy could expose her for misleading their friends about where she got the pencil case. Seeing her reaction, Kathy feels terrible about treating her friend so harshly. She is caught up in discrediting Ruth, even though she ultimately feels that it does not matter. ‘All this effort, all this planning, just to upset my dearest friend,’ she says. **This key moment suggests Kathy can be a mean heroine. Her flash of unkindness to Ruth also impacts the direction of the plot by endangering her friendship with Ruth.**

Selfless

Kathy is often shown as a selfless heroine. She puts aside her true feelings for Tommy and helps Ruth to restart her relationship with him. Ruth and Tommy became a couple while still at Hailsham. Their relationship is surprising. Tommy had been a laughing stock and was bullied for years while Ruth has always tried to be popular. This gives us the impression that their relationship may be based on something other than love. They break up after about six months and Ruth turns to Kathy to help them get back together. ‘You always had this way with him. He’ll listen to you,’ she tells Kathy. It seems as if Ruth thinks Kathy can communicate

better with Tommy than she can. Kathy is seen by some of the students as the ‘natural successor’ to Ruth. Rumours of a relationship between Kathy and Tommy began after he broke up with Ruth. Kathy had been planning to start a relationship with another boy, Harry, at the time. However, she considers Tommy to be a very special person. It seems as if they are on the brink of becoming a couple. **In this key moment, Ruth appeals to Kathy for help in reuniting with Tommy. Tellingly, Kathy agrees to help Ruth rekindle her relationship with Tommy, putting her own feelings aside in a moment of true selflessness.**

When the trio are adults, Ruth admits that she intentionally prevented Kathy and Tommy becoming a couple. ‘It should have been you two...but I kept you apart.’ She begs them to ‘put right what I messed up for you’. **Ruth contrasts strongly with Kathy at this stage – her admission of selfishness underlines how selfless Kathy had been back at Hailsham. It is one of Kathy’s most striking characteristics as a heroine and changes the course of the story by rekindling Ruth and Tommy’s relationship.**

Lonely

The novel’s heroine, Kathy, is in some ways a very lonely character. Along with her friends, she has no family because they have been cloned. One of her favourite things to do as a child is to listen to a song called ‘Never Let Me Go’ by Judy Bridgewater. She explains what she used to imagine while listening to this song. ‘I imagined it was about this woman who’d been told she couldn’t have babies. But then she’d had one, and she was so pleased, and she was holding it ever so tightly to her breast...and she’s going baby, baby, Never Let Me Go’. Clones like Kathy are unable to have children. It is easy to see the connection between her and the woman she imagined in the song. Kathy would like to be that woman – she would like to be able to have children, even though she has been told she cannot. **This highlights one of the most poignant aspects of our heroine. She**

wants to have her own family. However, even though she is capable of loving, she will never get to share that love with a family. Kathy's desire to have a family is further seen as she tries to discover who her possible is – or at least, the person whose DNA was cloned in order to make her. She looks through pornographic magazines while staying at the Cottages – a halfway house for clones before they begin work as carers – hoping to find someone who resembles her possible. Later, she explains to Tommy that she has strong sexual urges and believes she inherited them from the person whose DNA was cloned to create her. 'I thought if I find her picture, in one of those magazines, it'll at least explain it... it would just, you know, kind of explain why I am the way I am'. Tommy reassures her that it is quite normal to have feelings of desire. **Kathy's loneliness in these moments adds to our understanding of her as a heroine. It also has a direct impact on the plot as it brings her closer to Tommy.**

Brave

A flaw in Kathy's character is that she shows cowardice when she needs to show bravery. She is upset when she sees 'Ruth pretending to forget things about Hailsham'. Kathy is irritated that Ruth wants to distance herself from Hailsham while they are staying at the Cottages. On two occasions, Ruth 'forgets' details about Hailsham. 'There's no way you've forgotten. So don't give me that,' says Kathy. She shows some courage by calling Ruth out for her insincerity. Ruth wants to appear grown-up, while Kathy cherishes the memory of where they spent their childhood.

However, Kathy is also capable of staying quiet when she should really speak up. Tommy, Ruth and Kathy go for a walk. Ruth talks about Tommy's artwork and his theory that former Hailsham students can get deferrals if they produce art that showed they were truly in love. It is a tense and uncomfortable key moment. Ruth wants to make fun of Tommy because his artwork is quite basic. Tommy is hurt by her comments.

'I don't see why it's such a joke,' he says, 'it's as good a theory as anyone else's'. Ruth continues to bait Tommy over the quality of his art. Kathy watches on, saying nothing. Ruth drags her into the conversation. 'It's not just me, sweetie. Kathy here finds your animals a complete hoot,' she says. This puts Kathy on the spot. She can either agree with Ruth or stand up for Tommy. 'In the end, I stayed silent,' says Kathy. Later, she admits that she 'could have challenged Ruth' or 'could even have gone up to Tommy and hugged him'. She regrets that she 'didn't say or do anything'. **Kathy is a heroine who can show moments of cowardice. This key moment leads to Kathy severing ties with Ruth and Tommy to begin her work as a carer.**

Idealistic

Kathy grows into a respected carer who knows how to speak up for donors. 'I've tried not to make a nuisance of myself, but I've figured out how to get my voice heard when I have to,' she explains. **Though Kathy sees herself as a practical person, she is also idealistic about her relationships.** Seven years after leaving the Cottages, she becomes Ruth's carer. Kathy wants to mend the friendship that was so badly damaged when Ruth humiliated Tommy, and made Kathy go along with it. However, she finds it hard to communicate with her one-time best friend. 'The sense of something not being right grew stronger and stronger,' she says. They visit Tommy together. He is also a donor now and is recovering from his second donation when they arrive. Ruth finally admits that she kept the two apart when they were at Hailsham. She urges Kathy and Tommy to go to Madame and ask for a deferral. 'You've at least got to try,' she says.

Tommy's theory that former Hailsham students can get a deferral if they can prove they are truly in love is put to the test when Kathy and Tommy call to Madame's house. She is living with Miss Emily, a former guardian at Hailsham. Madame and Miss Emily tell the couple that there is no

such thing as deferrals. Miss Emily says that this rumour has existed for many years. She always tried to ‘stamp it out good and proper’ at Hailsham but Madame said: ‘If they’re so foolish, let them believe it’. Kathy, along with Tommy, seems naïve in this key moment. However, they were right to believe that the guardians had a hidden motive for taking their artwork. ‘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*,’ says Miss Emily. **Kathy is an idealist who likes to think the world will do what she wants. However, she learns that her life is truly out of her control.** ‘Your life must now run the course that’s been set for it,’ says Miss Emily. It is a tough lesson for Kathy. Her idealism has been crushed by the reality of life for clones. This visit to Madame and Miss Emily leaves Kathy, as well as Tommy, feeling hopeless.

Thoughtful

The novel ends by showing Kathy as a thoughtful heroine. Tommy ends their relationship. His fourth and final donation is coming up, and his health is deteriorating. ‘I don’t want to be that way in front of you,’ he says. He does not want Kathy to see him suffering – he is afraid she will be left with bad memories of him. The couple spend a ‘surprisingly tranquil’ final few

weeks together before they say goodbye. There is ‘no big farewell number’ but Kathy remembers seeing Tommy wave her off. ‘I watched him in my rear-view, and he was standing there almost till the last moment. Right at the end I saw him raise his hand vaguely and turn away...’ she says. She notes that while she has lost the important people in her life, the memory of them stays with her. ‘I lost Ruth, then I lost Tommy, but I won’t lose my memories of them,’ she says. Kathy’s deep and thoughtful nature can be seen in the novel’s final scene when she visits Norfolk, a place in England. Kathy and her friends used to joke that everything they had lost could be found there. She looks out across a field ‘half-closed my eyes, and imagined this was the spot where everything I’d ever lost since my childhood had washed up,’ she explains. Kathy imagines Tommy coming to see her across the field, even though at this point, he has died. She notes that the ‘fantasy never got beyond that’ before turning ‘back to the car, to drive off to wherever I was supposed to be’. **This key moment causes Kathy to reflect on where she wants to go next in life – she realises that she is now ready to finish her work as a carer and become a donor. It is a poignant and reflective way to finish the novel. We understand that Kathy has been a complex heroine but one who is ultimately a thoughtful and decent person.**

KEY POINTS



- Kathy H. is the heroine of the novel.
- Kathy shows kindness from a young age. She stands up for Tommy when he is being bullied. She also accepts his apology after he accidentally hits her during one of his tantrums. Kathy’s friends claim not to like Tommy. She risks becoming unpopular when she is kind to him.
- There are moments in the novel when Kathy can be very mean to people, including her best friend, Ruth.
- Kathy suspects that Ruth has misled people about where she got a new pencil case. Ruth suggested that Miss Geraldine gave it to her – thus, making her the teacher’s favourite student. Kathy pretends to check the register (record of Sales) and suggests that Ruth bought the pencil case for herself. Ruth is upset as she does not want to be

exposed as a liar. Kathy realises that she has been needlessly mean with Ruth.

- Kathy is often shown as a selfless person. She puts aside her true feelings for Tommy and helps Ruth to restart her relationship with him. Rumours of a relationship between Kathy and Tommy began after he broke up with Ruth. Kathy had been planning to start a relationship with another boy, Harry, at the time. However, she considers Tommy to be a very special person. It seems as if they are on the brink of becoming a couple. In a key moment, Ruth appeals to Kathy for help in reuniting with Tommy. Tellingly, Kathy helps Ruth out, putting her own concerns aside in a moment of true selflessness.
- When the trio are adults, Ruth admits that she had intentionally prevented Kathy and Tommy becoming a couple. Her admission of selfishness underlines how selfless Kathy had been back at Hailsham.
- Our heroine Kathy is in some ways a very lonely character. She would dearly love to have a child of her own. She also wants to know who her possible is – or at least, the person whose DNA was cloned in order to make her. Kathy's loneliness in these moments adds to our understanding of her as a heroine. It also has a direct impact on the plot.
- Kathy is a complex character. She is a heroine who can show moments of cowardice. She calls out Ruth for being fake. She thinks that Ruth is pretending when she 'forgets' important moments they shared at Hailsham because she wants to seem grown-up. However, she also goes along with Ruth's criticisms of Tommy's art and theory. She says nothing when Ruth mocks Tommy's art. Looking back, she regrets not showing Tommy her support.
- Kathy can have a very idealistic view of the world. She goes with Tommy to ask Madame and Miss Emily for a deferral. The former guardians listen to what the pair have to say, but they confirm that there is no such things as a deferral. The clones must continue with their lives as expected. Kathy is an idealist who likes to think the world will do what she wants. However, she learns that her life is truly out of her control.
- The novel ends by showing Kathy as a thoughtful heroine.
- Tommy ends their relationship – his health is deteriorating, and he does not want Kathy to see him unwell. This key moment causes Kathy to reflect on where she wants to go next in life – she realises that she is now ready to become a donor.
- Kathy's deep and thoughtful nature can be seen in the novel's final scene when she visits Norfolk, a place in England. Kathy and her friends used to joke that everything they had lost could be found there.
- Kathy has been a complex heroine but one who is ultimately a thoughtful and decent person.