
RETHINKING ISHIGURO'S NEVER LET ME GO

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ABSTRACT

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, Never Let Me Go, is magnificent piece literary fiction. Though, upon first reading, many critics & readers label it as science-fiction, yet it does not appear to be accurate, entirely. Only scratches the surface of what the work is. What appears to be a fact, is not possible to categories this literary piece, under any particular segment of literary work. Science fiction, as a literary device, is what Ishiguro has used, to make the story seem plausible. The work reflects a childlike innocence, bursting with vague hopes, laughter, and tender tears. There seems to be a possibility, that treating the work as science fiction rob it of its sense of history and originality. Keeping all these perspectives in view, the present paper tries to investigate, Never Let Me Go, labeled as a science-fiction or not. The basic intention of the paper is to identify the elements existing in the novel 'Never Let Me Go', which instigate the readers to rethink and reconsider it to be a literary work that transcends the tag of it being merely identified as a Science-fiction. In order to achieve the objective of the paper, the researcher has adopted a descriptive and analytic methodology. The data collected and presented in the paper is based on the literature survey of various articles, findings of the previous research done in the said light, personal observation of the researcher textual reading and published interviews of Ishiguro. Authors acknowledge the immense help received from the scholars whose articles are cited and included in references to this manuscript. The authors are also grateful to authors/ editors / publishers of all those articles, journals and books from where the literature for this article has been reviewed and discussed.

KEYWORDS: *Never Let Me Go, Science-Fiction, Human Rights, Love*

1. INTRODUCTION

Never Let Me Go is a heartfelt, pathos-filled drama about the human condition. However, the novel "steps outside of history, planting itself in a kind of alternative England in the 1990s" (Shaffer 2008,p.196) [20].The story begins with the introduction of Kathy H., the novel's thirty-one year old protagonist as well as the narrator. Throughout the story, she reflects on the most significant events in her life since leaving Hailsham with her two other friends, Ruth and Tommy. Here, Hailsham is an establishment that is similar to that of a boarding school. However, it becomes clear over the course of the narrative that it is a cloning institution and that Kathy and her friends live in a dystopian society. Cigarettes are bad for them and being creative is one of the most crucial things they need to be. Guardians serve as both tutors and parents to the students they watch over. It is one of the guardians, Miss Lucy who explains them that their destinies have been

predetermined and that their only existence is meant to donate their vital organs till they 'complete'. This is evident in the following statement: "None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day. [1]

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" The students' inexperience and naiveté make it difficult for them to grasp this fact. After a few days, Miss Lucy was said to have left Hailsham, which reawakened students' suspicions. She has either departed on her own accord or has been dragged away. Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy are sixteen years old the first time they are removed from Hailsham and are sent to a facility called 'The Cottages' where they must wait until a certain age before becoming a carer. There are rumours concerning deferrals, which state that if two Hailsham students can prove their love for one another, they will be granted an extra three years. Despite the fact that it intrigues pupils, many reject the concept because they believe it to be just rumour. Kathy becomes Ruth's carer years later, as her second donation nears completion. Ruth begs Kathy's forgiveness, mindful of the short time remaining to her. It will be several days before Ruth 'completes', which is an euphemism in the novel for the word 'die'. Tommy and Kathy finally get together, exactly as Ruth had hoped, and both of them then headed to Madame for deferral where they found Miss Emily which was surprising for them. Both of them spoke to Miss Emily and Madame and discover the truth about Hailsham and also about the deferrals which was completely untrue and again a rumour among the students. They also provide details on the health of other clones around the world. People have longer lives as a result of organ donation, but they have no idea that clones exist. As a result, many clones are kept in appalling conditions from the time they are babies until they 'complete'. Hailsham, on the other hand, is a unique case. It protects the students from the harsh realities of the outside world, and it gives the clones a happy childhood by keeping their true destiny a secret. After Tommy's fourth donation, he dies, but Kathy is still there to carry on with hers. At the novel's conclusion, we witness Kathy remorseful about her. [2]

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are plethora of references and critical evaluation available for this novel. Ever since the publication of *Never Let Me Go*, academics, writers, and critics have delved deep into the story. For instance, Mimi Wong refers the novel as a 'masterpiece of racial metaphor'¹. Similarly, Louis Menand labelled it as a 'quasi-science fiction'². Catherine Charlwood in her article *STOP. . .AND REMEMBER*: MEMORY AND AGEING IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S [5]

NOVELS have highlighted and explored the representations of memory and ageing. It examines the relationships Ishiguro presents between memory age and also what happens to the ways in which memories are valued, and how people might be valued or not for their memories (Charlwood, 2018) [3]. Melissa Quach has conducted a structuralist analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* using A. J. Greimas' actantial plot analysis, which was further expanded by Louis Hébert. She has shown 'how the tension of love and friendship is portrayed by using actantial model. . .The actantial model highlights and emphasizes the realistic emotions and situations while the set-up is in fact unrealistic, as Ishiguro himself states: "the sci-fi speculative surface of the story was the last piece. . .almost like a device. . ." (Film Independent Interview) (Quach, 2017) [17]. Whether such statements and explorations are succinct, it remains debatable. No doubt, each of them has analyzed the novel from a unique perspective and provided their own unique insights. No one, however, has ever looked into exactly what genre this book belongs to in the first place. An examination and analysis of the novel's elements shows that it defies categorization into a single genre. *Never Let Me Go* is a complex novel with many layers that

need to be discovered. [6]

SUPPOSITION ABOUT THE NOVEL

Science fiction, often known as literature of ideas, explores fantastical themes like space, light, time travel, and life beyond our solar system. While many writers, readers, and critics believe that *Never Let Me Go* is a sci-fi novel due to the inclusion of cloning, this article argues that every page is packed with consciousness, human history, and civilization rather than being pure science fiction. A key point of this article is that by classifying Ishiguro's novel as science fiction, we're erasing both the novel's beauty and its wisdom. Ishiguro himself states in an interview that the novel is, 'A kind of metaphor if you like for human existence/human condition — the fact that our existence is limited . . .the sci-fi speculative surface of the story was the last piece. . .almost like a device.' (Film Independent Interview). Rather *Never Let Me Go* is 'about how we face that knowledge, that time is limited; what we do when we realize we haven't got that much longer, what are the things. [7]

MILIEU

As humanity has progressed toward perfection, a dark, subhuman past has been kept hidden, a history that dates back only to proto history. It is a historical fact that no one ever wrote about that time period. In order to avoid persecution or criticism, historians exercise caution while describing historical events. But there exist documents, even if they are difficult to locate due to the fact that some have been hidden or erased; however, what is accessible is only a small portion of what is actually there. When it comes to setting the stage for the plot, Ishiguro excels at creating a subtly bubbly, effervescent backdrop. [8] If he had stated it clearly, we would have had a difficult time getting through the novel. The world will be more disturbed if the truth is explicitly revealed. Instead of being renowned as a writer of classical fiction, Kazuo Ishiguro is best known for his writings set in World War II, particularly the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, which are portrayed in his other novels, *An Artist of the Floating World* and *A Pale View of Hills*. A similar subject is raised by the film *Never Let Me Go*, which asks how organs are procured in the modern day. As John Freeman (2005) states: *Never Let Me Go* changes a major detail in the realm of science. It imagines a world in which genetic cloning — not nuclear technology— turns out to be the defining science of the twentieth century" (Shaffer 2008, p.196) [20]. It is thus difficult to mention what type of novel it is. But any reference or regarding the novel as science-fiction, Ishiguro bristles: "When I am writing fiction, I don't think in terms of genre at all. I write a completely different way. It starts with ideas" (Shaffer 2008, p.196) [20]. There is always a sense of enigma around Ishiguro's real subject matter. As Sonali Das (2020) [4] states: "While the situations in his books, especially the emotional ones, are described in such a clear and precise manner, some of the tedious and monotonous details are done in a comical manner, and at the same time, the focus is entirely on the protagonist's struggle to find a kind of happiness, solace and satisfaction in an unwilling world" (Das,2020,p.1023) [4].

NARRATIVE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

In addition to being a science fiction novel, it appears that the novel's genre is strongly linked to the human rights story genre. As far as the human rights narrative goes, only ideals like equality and dignity for all people are included. The novel's human rights story is up against the opposing forces of indifference and denial, which have rendered crimes both horrifying and an accepted part of daily life. Ishiguro uses a unique mash-up of storytelling techniques and genres to speak to current societal concerns. Concerns about human rights are also part of the mix. *Never Let Me Go* defies categorization. The story of Kathy is essentially a Bildungsroman. [9] We learn about her growth as a person from her time at Hailsham boarding school and her friendship with Ruth and Tommy. We also learn about her role as a 'carer' or a nurse who cares for the clones and helps

them recover after their donation process. The Bildungsroman demonstrates how a person's desire for independence and wants may be balanced with their obvious duties to society. As a result, the topic of how far an individual's goals should match the obligations and responsibilities required by society is raised. As a result, Bildungsroman's narrative structure and subject are strikingly similar to human rights literature. "Both human rights and the idealist Bildungsroman posit the individual personality as an instance of a universal human personality, as the social expression of an abstract humanity that theoretically achieves its manifest destiny when the egocentric drives of the individual harmonize with the demands of social organization". [11]

Slaughter meant that in Bildungsroman and human rights, the protagonist represents all other people who are trying to find their position in society. Both genres provide favorable settings for the full and unrestricted development of a person's individuality. As Das (2020) in her paper further states: "Each genre has depicted the state as an ideal world in which individuals have the right and freedom to meet their own needs and desires, but paradoxically, the same state later restrains those individuals by forcing them to give up their own needs and desires in order to meet the requirements of the so-called ideal society" (Das, 2020, p. 1023-1024) [4]. The clone community is represented by the voice of Kathy. Like other clones who "complete" or sacrifice their lives through the gruesome procedure of organ harvesting or donation in order to save the lives of other people, Kathy will eventually be forced to sacrifice her own wants and needs in order to meet society's demands. Who are the intended recipients of these clones? This is also not addressed, and all that is seen is that they are giving and 'completing'. There is an imperialistic hegemony that is never explicitly stated, but it is plain to perceive. Ishiguro does not deal with the contentious parts of world socio-political life here, but instead creates a really lovely storey of human relationships and relationships in general. [12] This tale depicts humans as helpless clones with no real agency. They are aware that, sooner or later, they will be 'finished' or die, but they can do nothing about it. They'd much prefer experience it that way. It's too upsetting to see them now. When it comes to cloning and organ harvesting, Ishiguro's matured imagination has created a world where these practices are commonplace. This society is ruled by those who have access to riches and power, and the rest of us have no say. In a subtle way, Ishiguro has addressed the problems and arguments surrounding the infringement of human dignity. Clones have been raised with the purpose of harvesting for the benefit of other people. People have had Dolly's cloning, which was only ever intended to be a scientific experiment, applied to them. This topic has generated a great deal of discussion and contention. All of these debates were missed by Ishiguro. It was as simple as creating a universe filled with clones that could be trained to serve him. The individuals who will get their organs influence how long they live. Not a word has been spoken about America's imperialistic hegemony. [13] However, the tale he has written has taken on a life of its own and become very moving. Symbolically, it's his worldview or conception of the cosmos that makes the novel unique. This feature affects us deeply. There's a warning somewhere that we're all becoming into clones, if not physically then spiritually, emotionally, and socially. We are all being forced to become clones in the name of progress, and we have no option but to comply. The story raises an important question: Why don't the clones manage to flee? Ishiguro's response to this is that he is not interested in reading about a slave revolt and eventual emancipation. But he's actually on the lookout for an allegory to illustrate how these individuals are forced to confront their own mortality and realise that they have no choice but to accept it. Because of this, he's unwilling to look at an account of an escape. He is interested in seeing how those folks deal with their predicament. [14] Despite the fact that these people are youthful, their lives are only supposed to continue for around thirty years, according to Kazuo Ishiguro's invention. As a result, they are stuck in a constrained concertina together for the duration of the dilemma. Those that are labelled as 'shadows' go through life stages such as adolescence, maturity, and old age, but they do so in a compressed time frame of thirty-five years, making them appear to be always youthful. What is it about the elements that becomes so valuable or significant when we realise that time is limited? In

addition to the above aspects, ‘love’ is one of the most prominent themes in *Never Let Me Go* which drives the action at each and every turn of the novel. From the very start of the novel itself, Kathy appears as subdued and lost, her problems appear to be deeper as she seems lonely. [15,16] In the beginning chapter, Kathy meets Tommy during the latter’s first rage where Kathy seems determined to help him as she goes over and picks up his favorite shirt which has been ruined. She further comforted Tommy by saying, “It’s nothing to worry about. . .It’ll come off. If you can’t get it off yourself, just take it to Miss Jody” (Ishiguro, 1991,p.11) [10]. Though it seems that love is not an important part, yet it has got several implications and prominence in the novel. Ruth and Tommy are romantically involved and Kathy being Ruth’s best friend seems rather more concerned for Tommy than Ruth. This seems like a love-triangle, but then again never anywhere in the novel had Kathy or Tommy or any other character have spelled out this relationship between Tommy and Kathy. But the actions of Kathy, her affection and concern towards Tommy was quite evident. There seems to lie a tension between friendship and love, as Quach (2017) [17] says: “. . .that Kathy wants to be romantically involved with Tommy yet retain her friendship with Ruth, who also has a romantic interest in him.” In fact Ishiguro himself agrees in an interview when he says: “we were trying to tell a story about love, friendship in the face of the bleak fact that we are mortal. . .” (Film Independent).

3. CONCLUSION

Kazuo Ishiguro is a writer with spiritual maturity, who writes with great emotional impact. [18,19] The drama of his life unfolds at the nexus of human history and the loss of humanism, which is the novel's beginning point. The purpose of science fiction is to entertain the reader by stimulating their curiosity about what could be possible in the future. In *Never Let Me Go*, on the other hand, the reader would not possibly be venturing into the cosmos. They do not come down to earth and stay where they see those personalities. It appears as if, they do not see any extra-terrestrial life forms. Consequently, the focus shifts away from science fiction. The twists and turns of the plot, along with the growth of the characters, imparts the novel, its strength [21-25].

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