

Reality Through The Lens Of Print Media In Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

V. Priyadharsini,

Reg no:19113044012011

Research Scholar,

Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University,

Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli- 627 012, Tamilnadu, India.

priyadharsini3516@gmail.com

Dr. Selva Mary Gokila S. George,

Research Supervisor,

Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University,

Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli- 627 012, Tamilnadu, India.

bienselva@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper entitled "Reality through the lens of print media in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" aims to explore the literary perspective and mainly engages with the themes of the novel. It also examines various kinds of medical issues related to cloning and organ transplants, in which human clones are forced to donate their organs in an

alternate reality, set in 1990s England. The storyline does not evolve around any legal proceedings, nor is there any direct reference to the law. Instead, Ishiguro confronts the reader with a state of lawlessness. He depicts a world characterized by an uncertain distance separating the characters and the law. By reading Ishiguro from a literary perspective, a new understanding of the various nuances is formed. These nuances interconnect to form the complex socio-legal configuration. This paper focuses on the concept of existential anguish in the context of the novel's story. It also encourages readers to study the real meaning and purpose of human life.

Keywords: Cloning, organ transplants, alternate reality, lawlessness, complex socio-legal configuration, existential anguish.

Reality through the lens of print media in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

"A good book leaves you wanting to reread the book. A great book compels you to read your soul." -Richard Flanagan

A novel is any relatively long work of narrative fiction, normally in prose, and typically published as a book. The term novel is a truncation of the Italian word *novella*. The novella is a kind of enlarged anecdote like those to be found in the 14th century Italian classic Boccaccio's *Decameron*, each of which exemplifies the etymology well enough. There are many factors which form a novel. Within its broad framework, the genre of the novel has encompassed an extensive range of types and styles like picaresque, epistolary, gothic, romantic, realist, historical etc. Kazuo Ishiguro has used various factors in his novel *Never Let Me Go* that has made his novel a thriving one. The factors include narrative style, characterization, themes, symbols, motifs, language, etc.

Never Let Me Go was written in the decade after the possibilities of human cloning became something more real and technologically possible with the successful cloning of a sheep known as Dolly. Many Scottish scientists took a cell from an adult sheep, fused it with another sheep's unfertilized egg and created an identical twin. The huge media attention on this development focused on assumption and worry about man's ability to manipulate biology. The story of Dolly exposes some uneasiness between politics, ethics and science thereby relating closely to the growing and ongoing controversy about embryonic stem cell research.

The novel does not tell anything about the science of human cloning or how, in a society that seems in many ways to be quite similar to one's own, it was ever thought ethically acceptable to rear children as clones and then harvest their organs. In an interview hosted by John Mullan when a question was thrown to Ishiguro writing of a novel, he replied "I didn't want to write anything that could be mistaken for a "prophecy". I wanted to write a story in which every reader might find an echo of his or her own life" (Ishiguro).

Never Let Me Go can be seen under dystopian or science fiction dimensions. But it is more of an 'alternate history' conceit. It is more in the line of 'What if Hitler had won?' or 'What if Kennedy hadn't been assassinated?'. Matthew Beedham, points out that "the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro demand that readers look honestly at the past, to consider what they hold valuable, and to question how they live their lives" (4).

Ishiguro had to have Kathy, the narrator talk appropriately in contemporary England in the novel. In the literary tradition of unreliable narration, the challenge is, getting a voice that properly presents the narrator's character. It is finding a voice that allows a reader to respond to a character not just through what he or she does in the story,

but also through how he or she speaks and thinks. Through the novel Ishiguro has succeeded in making Kathy's voice suitable for someone living in contemporary England. In the novel the maximum number of scenes pulled from the narrator's memory is blurred at the edges. It is not just telling the reader 'this-and-this happened'. It is also raising questions like: Why has she remembered this event just at this point? How does she feel about it? And when she says she can't remember very precisely what happened, she tells everyone how much everyone trusts her?.

A first person narrative is where a story is narrated by one character at a time speaking for and about them. First person narrators can be authoritative and reliable or deceptive and unreliable. Such a narrator will refer to himself/herself using the first person singular form 'I' or the first person plural form 'We'. The reader will encounter only the thoughts, opinions and feelings of the narrator, and no other characters. In some stories first person narrators may refer to information they have heard from the others characters in order to deliver a larger point of view.

Never Let Me Go is told from the first person narrative that is the story is told from Kathy's point of view. Looking back at her thirty-one years, Kathy tells about the key moments in her life. All the information gathered about the world in which Kathy lives is represented in Kathy's language and consists of what Kathy has seen. Kathy is also the controller of the story that is been told. Kathy, as the first person narrator, not only determines how the story is told but also what the story is about. By reading Kathy's narrative, one can displace it from its intended audience (clones in an alternate reality) into one's own world. As a narrative displaced from Kathy's alternate world, *Never Let Me Go* is looked upon as a science fiction by the readers.

The novel may also be considered as a cautionary tale regarding the abuse of science and technology on humans and their civil rights. It is a story in which science and technology are conspicuously absent. Though the novel is narrated by a human clone and the major character are clones, no scientists or doctors are seen in the novel. There is no theory or explanation of genetic replications. Indeed the most technologically advanced item to appear in the novel is the automobile. The lack of science in the novel about clones has led to some anxiety among critics as to how to categorize the novel? Gabriele Griffin comments "Many critics puzzled over the novel's genre, registering an affinity to science fiction" (Shaddox 449). Leona Toker writes that this "mild and melancholy dystopia" evokes Huxley's *Brave New World* "because the foundational ideas of both the novels have to do with in-vitro creation of human beings" (Shaddox 449).

Plot setting is one of the major aspects associated with any literary work. It is the structure of a story and the sequence in which the author arranges events in a story. The structure often includes the rising action, the climax, the falling action, and the resolution. *Never Let Me Go* takes place in the late 20th, in England where human beings are cloned and bred for purposes of harvesting their organs once they reach adulthood. These clones are reared in boarding school-type institutions called Hailsham. Hailsham is a grand place whose ample grounds encompass a pond and pavilion. It is staffed by guardians who have quasi-parental function of the boarding school housemaster or mistress. Once the children have reached maturity they leave their school-type community and embark on an adult life, in which they are given limited access to the normal world while they await the summons to make their first donation. This is where Kathy, as carer, comes in. She is the attending angel.

Kathy's capacity for emotion provides the narrative occasion. She reminisces about her time at Halisham. Her two most important friends are Ruth, a captivating but manipulative and deceitful girl, and Tommy, a kind boy with a bad temper who is hated by other students. Halisham places a great emphasis on art, writing and other forms of creativity. A mysterious woman named Madame comes periodically to take the student's best artwork to an off-campus gallery. Tommy is not particularly good at these things and never gets pieces into the gallery, and this is the cause why he is ostracized. At the end of the novel, Kathy herself is about to make her first donation. She goes to mourn for the dead Tommy in a field in Norfolk. There, she imagines all the things she has lost and most importantly she dreams about Tommy.

The toughest part of writing a novel comes with choosing a theme. The theme of any particular work serves as the heart of that work. So it is very important to choose a theme which has something to convey to the readers in an efficient way. It is a major idea broad enough to cover the entire scope of a literary work. In *Never Let Me Go* Ishiguro has chosen the themes in a way which moves the reader's mind more genuinely. Ishiguro has brought various themes like friendship, Identity, memory and the past, passivity, and culture, dreams, hopes, plans, freedom and confinement.

The friendships in the novel *Never Let Me Go* are very complicated, yet they show reality. In the novel, just like the real life, friends fight, have misunderstandings, support each other at times of trouble, and accidentally or persistently hurt each other's feelings. Likewise, when Kathy is young, all these little stuffs get into her. But as an adult Kathy breaks free from all these things. Her flashback on Ruth and Tommy confirms the ups and downs of friendship, yet they also remind about how enduring friendship can be. The dreaded question: who am I? is often asked by every individual in their day to day life.

But Kathy and her friends have another question to inquire about: what am I? Understanding what it means to be a clone is a big part of Kathy to figure out who she is. She needs to decide if her identity is connected with the person she was modeled from, or if that does not matter at all.

Kathy spends a great deal mulling over who she is and how she relates to normal humans. In the end it is left to the readers to find whether Kathy finds her identity or not. The fact that Kathy is obsessed with her past with Halisham, her childhood friends and her old cassette tape is apparent through the novel. She is very deeply connected with her past that she barely tells anything about her present life. The entire novel is a series of flashbacks. Looking back is one way that Kathy can muddle through the things she has lost over the years. Kathy looks back at her life, and this is of a greater significance that all of her old friends are gone. They continue to exist only in her memory.

The mutiny of clones never happens in the novel. Instead, Kathy and her friends surrender to their fate without any wavering of thoughts. The clones are a kind of appealing passive characters. They never really battle against the system or try to find jobs, which does not involve giving away vital organs. This seems to be miserable and frustrating. This novel connects submission with achievement and even pleasure, which is evident when Kathy and her friends take pleasure out of doing their jobs. They know they are going to die one day, yet they have no regrets.

When Ishiguro talks about *Never Let Me Go*, he never refers to his main characters as anything other than people, human beings. Kathy's emotions are so repressed that makes her seem robotic, but underneath the repression, her emotions are painfully human. In the book's last pages, Kathy shows a spark of anger and grief that readers would expect from an ordinary human in her situation. When Tommy tells her that he doesn't want her

to remain his carer through his last donation, Kathy is "furious," but she keeps her "voice quiet and under control" (281). At such an upsetting time, her control appears truly inhuman. She has not yet removed the repression veiling her emotions. Kathy and Tommy have "loved each other all their lives. But in the end, they can't stay together forever" (282). Tommy cuts short the few months they have together. Kathy keeps her superhuman composure until after Tommy dies. Here, at last, is the deep emotion Kathy has kept under wraps the entire novel, hinting at but never expressing. She cries, but doesn't let the fantasy get out of control, and eventually returns to her car and resumes driving. Her tendency to hold back takes over, but a momentary slip is enough to reveal the humanity it made doubtful. Kathy's tyranny is not a proof that she is less emotional than a human being more clone-like than other clones. It simply masks the emotional sensitivity that identifies her as an undeniably human.

Every character in the novel is interconnected and influences the impression of each theme of the novel. Priorities are lost throughout the novel. The meaning of what it means to be a human and to have a soul is almost lost with the modifications to the human life and dark society who accept the tremendous form of genetic engineering. Money has replaced the value of human life. Nowadays, people started focusing on money and material pleasures rather, the value for human emotions decreased. Through the characters in the novel, the readers are made to think about the lost meaning of a happy life and the real purpose of human life.

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