

A Study of loss and memory in Kazuo Ishiguro

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Abstract

Hence Stevens has to admit to himself at the end of the narrative that his entire life has been a lie, a deception, a sham- serving a cause which is now viewed derogatively as Nazi collaboration and missing out on his father's death as well as his possible romance with Miss Kenton which is now irretrievably lost as a consequence of his striving for excellence professionally to the suppression of his private persona- only to find at the end of his life that the dignity he strove for is a hollow lie now his master is shown to be a Nazi sympathizer and the people he has overlooked in performing his professional duties to perfection- his father and Miss Kenton are irrevocably lost. Never Let me Go is ultimately a love story, and a story about the depths of passion set in a cruel and hostile environment which denies clones the right to love on the basis that they are less than human when it is clear from our reading that the clones are more human than human, experiencing every shade and depth of emotion indeed on a deeper and more spiritual level than the cold, calculating and inhumane humans who run the clone experiment. Increasingly, the couple in The Buried Giant come to fear both the damaging power of forgetting their shared past, and remembering its less ideal moments too. Their memory loss makes their love for each other less complex and spoiled. While they cannot remember the past, they also cannot remember the dark moments and sad moments of their past. The simple childlike love of their continual present, is changing as memories return, and could change as more memories do. Ishiguro's point here might be that people who do not remember their past cannot forgive each other even between two people in love.

In Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, the question of the humanity of artificially produced life is raised: Do Clones have souls? Ishiguro's answer is a resounding yes. In his imagined dystopia, clones are raised with an eye on harvesting their organs in the form of donations to complete their life span. The highlight of the novel is the relationship that develops between Tommy and Kathy, and a love triangle that involves Ruth, a fellow clone. Throughout the novel, the emotional passage of the clones as they grow up and struggle to come to terms with their fate in Hailsham is documented, and it is made lucidly clear that clones do indeed have a thriving inner life and are thus virtually indistinguishable from normal human beings.

Hailsham, the boarding school in which the clones are raised, is a cruel experiment. While most of the school's activities are difficult to distinguish from those of a normal boarding school, there is an emphasis on assessing the creativity of the clones, in terms of assessing the art and poetry they produce. The rationale behind these activities is to demonstrate that clones being artificially produced will not be able to reach the artistic competence of a normal human being because they lack an inner life. Indeed, Tommy produces repeatedly what one of the teachers calls rubbish, and is at one point told that it did not matter if he could not be creative because the teacher probably understands that clones being what they are would be incapable of emotional depths and creativity. But through the novel the series of meetings and affections that develop between Tommy and Kathy are authentic emotions and indeed, they attempt to obtain a deferral from their fate as organ donors by seeking exemption from donating because they are genuinely in love, which is ruthlessly thwarted of course, because the humans that run the cloning experiment deny them the right to love or the right to be recognized as fellow human beings. Indeed, the cold inhumanity with which they are denied the right to escape their fate as donors highlights that ironically, it is the clones who are capable of emotional depths and compassion as well as love while it is the humans who commit atrocities and are inhumane.

The height of the capacity for emotional depths is highlighted in several scenes. One involves Tommy reproaching Kathy for taking sex casually by just stimulating herself through porn magazines, he explains that sex can be meaningful if love is involved; it need not be just a mechanical act. Then there is the scene in which they are denied their deferral and they cling to each other with what seems to be in infinite embrace, capturing in this moment the intensity of their passion for each other, which far surpasses the hollowness and superficiality of the emotions evinced by their human counterparts at Hailsham. Indeed, in *Never Let Me Go*, the clones are more human than human, and Ishiguro's insight is that authentic emotion can exist independently of its origin, whether a being is naturally or artificially produced.

The love affair between Tommy and Kathy can be seen as a gradual one, though it is clear from the start that Kathy cares for Tommy despite his outcast nature and that Tommy in turn cares for Kathy despite repeatedly getting back with Ruth who apologises at the end that she is the one who has kept Tommy and Kathy apart, and it is they who are truly in love and thus deserving of obtaining a deferral from Hailsham on the grounds that they experience authentic emotion and depths of passion.

The grounds on which the clones are subjugated to the humans and exploited by them for organ donations is thus seen to be fundamentally flawed. It is clear that the clones are capable of depths of emotion, as the moving love affair that unfolds between Kathy and Tommy demonstrates. Kathy begins caring for Tommy even though the rest of the clones mock and ostracize him, and this is seen from the time she cares about him getting his best shirt dirty and talks to him about wearing his best shirt to football not being a wise decision. He grumpily tells her that it is none of her business, but eventually regrets saying that and apologises profusely after for hurting her while she was trying to help him.

The plight of the clones is profoundly pitiful. It is clear from the passages that the clones are hardly different from the humans, the only difference is their artificial rather than natural origin, because the clones, think, feel, suffer, long and have a whole range of emotions similar to the humans which include lust and love. Madame, the leader of the experiment is described as being frightened of the clones, and the cruel inhumanity with

which she denies Kathy and Tommy their deferral at the end seals the conclusion that ironically it is the humans such as her that are inhumane and the clones, who, experiencing depths of love and compassion for each other, are more human than human.

Indeed that the clones are constantly being assessed for their creativity to demonstrate that they are less than human and to show that they are deserving of being treated as less than human simply confirms the cruel nature of the experiment. While it is clear that Tommy produces rubbish as art it is also clear that he experiences the whole range of human emotions and might be less creative not because he does not possess an inner life but because he simply does not have the interest or talent for art, but this seems to be taken simply as evidence that he, as a clone, cannot live up to the artistic depths and talents of a natural human being.

The novel also examines other aspects of the plight of being a clone. As clones, they can only mimic the gestures of real human beings in order to feel authentic, as Ruth who keeps imitating Chrissy and Rodney does. Indeed it may be true that the clones because of what they are cannot be as creative and original as naturally born human beings and are reduced to simulacrum, copying the gestures of original human beings as well as producing art that is in the words of the teachers, rubbish.

The height of the pathos of being a clone is seen when Kathy is listening to a record “Never let me go” which goes “Baby, Never let me go” and she imagines it is about a mother whose child is taken away from her and cannot bear to let her child go. This confirms her status as a clone, because an original human would be able to discern that Baby is just a term of endearment and it is clear the song is actually about a lost love and someone who is longing to be reunited with her love but Kathy as a clone, misinterprets it because she does not have an authentic human upbringing but a highly rigid and disciplined as well as artificial setting in which they are prepared solely for the purpose of their organ donations.

It is also clear that all the clones experience a full spectrum of emotions including jealousy and competition which is why Ruth repeatedly keeps Tommy and Kathy apart when it is clear that they are the ones who truly feel for each other. In the description of their time at Hailsham, from the mention of the secret guard business to the mysterious pencil case and Kathy and Ruth’s tense exchanges about whether their friendship remains and is genuine, it is

clear that even if the clones are not as capable of being creative as their human counterparts they experience every shade and depth of emotion that an original human being does.

It is thus quite clear that the clones are being exploited and treated cruelly, as organ banks and lesser than human when in fact they are more human than human, as the love triangle between Tommy, Kathy and Ruth shows. The ultimate sacrifice that Ruth makes at the end, to allow Tommy and Kathy to seek a deferral and be united as true loves shows that clones are capable of even self-sacrifice even though Ruth had clung selfishly to Tommy earlier on. That ultimate denial of self and the sacrifice that Ruth makes stands in stark contrast to the cold and calculating malice with which the humans treat the clones and exploit them for organ donations.

Never Let me Go is ultimately a love story, and a story about the depths of passion set in a cruel and hostile environment which denies clones the right to love on the basis that they are less than human when it is clear from our reading that the clones are more human than human, experiencing every shade and depth of emotion indeed on a deeper and more spiritual level than the cold, calculating and inhumane humans who run the clone experiment. The novel is thus about the cruelty of human exploitation of artificial humans for organs when on every level of experience and description, it is the clones who are capable of emotional depths, romance, friendship and sorrow, indeed they experience all this on a level that is magnified and intensified because of their short life span and the artificial and contrived environment in which they are brought up.

The novel is thus about the triumph of emotion against the cold scientific and clinical backdrop in which the clones are raised, indeed they are brought up and taught not to feel and love but against these odds it is precisely these feelings that Tommy and Kathy experience. *Never Let me Go* is thus a story about the utopian quest for love in a deeply dystopian environment which contrives to their annihilation in speculative England.

The *Remains of the Day* is Kazuo Ishiguro's tale of Stevens, a repressed butler, who performs his professional duties to perfection in his entire life at Darlington Hall, only to find at the twilight of his years there that he has served a false idea as Lord Darlington is now notorious as a Nazi sympathizer and the one possibility of romance that Stevens had with

Miss Kenton is irrevocably lost because Stevens did not reciprocate when she made advances towards him when they were younger and though she has survived a marriage which was previously unhappy she has come to terms with her life and begun to love her husband eventually. Stevens spends the remainder of the narrative haunted by loss and the idea of what could have been had he not made professional duty such a large priority in his life.

Stevens throughout the narrative has been unable to separate his public persona from his private persona, in fact he has repressed his private persona to the point of no longer possessing any private persona in his efforts to be the very best butler possible and the perfect butler who inhabits his role consummately and shows no trace of a private life or private persona. The consequence is that he lives out a lie, serving a man, Lord Darlington, who is now shamefully derided as a Nazi Sympathizer and Stevens has performed his professional duties to him so consummately that he cannot pretend that he has committed his own mistakes, unlike Lord Darlington. Stevens expresses regret over the fact that Lord Darlington had been allowed to make his own mistakes whereas Stevens cannot say the same for himself, he has led a life of following Lord Darlington's orders to every consummate detail, including dismissing Jewish members of the staff, and it is with great regret that Stevens now finds that his entire professional excellence has been a lie because he has been serving a Fascist and Nazi sympathizer which Britain now unreservedly condemns.

Steven's entire problem is his over-inhabitation of the professional sphere:

Lesser butlers will abandon their professional being for the private one at the least provocation. For such persons, being a butler is playing a pantomime role, a small push, a slight stumble, and the façade will drop off to reveal the actor underneath. The great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost, they will not be shaken out by external events, however surprising, alarming or vexing. They wear professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit: he will not let ruffians or circumstance tear it off him in a public gaze, he will discard it when, and only when, he wills to do so, and this will be when he is entirely alone. (Ishiguro 1989: 42-43)

Indeed, Stevens has successfully repressed his personal and private self so much that he failed to be by the side of his dying father as he was busy attending to one of Lord Darlington's conferences, and he has forgone all possibility of romance with Miss Kenton because he was too busy attending to one of Darlington's political conferences and ignored her when she made a last ditch attempt to lure him away from his public persona by telling Stevens she was getting married in the hope that Stevens would finally protest and admit his feelings for her.

Lord Darlington wasn't a bad man. He wasn't a bad man at all. And at least he had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes. His lordship was a courageous man. He chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a misguided one, but there, he chose it, he can say that at least. As for myself, I cannot even claim that. You see, I trusted. I trusted in his lordship's wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile, I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really, one has to ask oneself- what dignity is there in that? (Ishiguro 1989: 243)

Stevens thought that there was dignity in proving oneself to be professionally excellent but finds at the end of his life he has lived out a lie because he has been serving something who is now disregarded and indeed looked upon with contempt because he was a political traitor and a Nazi sympathizer. Hence Stevens life of professional dignity and performing his butler's role to perfection now proves to be a sham, a lie and a façade. Throughout the narrative Stevens has been lying to himself and rationalizing to himself that his life of professional excellence at the expense of his private life was something to be proud of but towards the end, when he finds that he has irrevocably lost Miss Kenton and there is no redemption for him at the end of his life, he finds that he can only look forward to the remains of the day- to be lived out with regret because he has spent his entire life living out a lie and performing Lord Darlington's whims and fancies including the termination of the Jewish members of the staff but now Stevens has to face the deflating fact that Darlington was a British traitor and a Nazi sympathizer and in no way honored among his fellow countrymen in Britain.

Stevens represses his private persona so perfectly that all attempts at romance with him by Miss Kenton are fought off resolutely during his time at Darlington hall, to the result that she marries a man she does not love and was unhappy for a large part of her life but has come to terms with it and has come to love the man she married. An example of one of their romantic sparring scenes is this:

She reached forward and began gently to release the volume from my grasp. I judged it best to look away while she did so, but with her person positioned so closely, this could only be achieved by the twisting of my head away at a somewhat unnatural angle. Miss Kenton continued very gently to prise the book away, practically one finger at a time. The process seemed to take a very long time – throughout which I managed to maintain my posture- until I finally heard her say:

“Good gracious, Mr Stevens, it isn’t anything scandalous at all. Just a sentimental love story.” (Ishiguro 1989: 167)

Hence Stevens deflects Miss Kenton’s romantic and sexual advances by making the excuse that he was reading the book merely to improve his English language and dismisses Miss Kenton from his sanctuary, but in doing so he also dismisses the one person who could have made his Darlington Hall experience worthwhile – the one woman he truly loved but only comes to admit this feeling to himself towards his twilight years when Miss Kenton has been married for over 20 years and his memory of their romance which could have been is now a faded memory to be swept under the carpet as Miss Kenton admits she has come to love the man she once did not love when she got married. Hence Stevens has to admit to himself at the end of the narrative that his entire life has been a lie, a deception, a sham-serving a cause which is now viewed derogatively as a Nazi sympathizer and missing out on his father’s death as well as his possible romance with Miss Kenton which is now irretrievable lost as a consequence of his striving for excellence professionally to the suppression of his private persona- only to find at the end of his life that the dignity he strove for is a hollow lie now his master is shown to be a Nazi sympathizer and the people he has overlooked in performing his professional duties to perfection- his father and Miss Kenton are irrevocably lost. *Remains of the day* is thus a study in loss, pain and regret at not doing

the opposite which is to seize the day, *Carpe diem* and make the most of life's opportunities when they are actually present.

The Buried Giant's two elderly protagonists, Beatrice and Axl, are on a quest to a neighbouring village to seek out their long-lost son. The background to their journey is a mythic Old England in which invading Saxons, having fought viciously with Britons, have since settled into an uneasy peace based on collective forgetfulness – an enforced amnesia that manifests, literally, as a mist (spread by the breath of a she-dragon, Querig) and robs the country, and our couple, of their memories of love.

On the way the characters encounter many characters: the elderly couple, a courageous Saxon warrior, a boy who becomes the warrior's apprentice and, most unenduring of all, a geriatric Gawain (the legendary Arthurian knight) who initially appears in woodland wilderness, with aching limbs and an ancient horse. Gawain, forever locked into his heavy, rusting armour, has the distantly comic air of the Tin Man – "...come closer and you'll see I'm just a whiskery old fool".

Axl and Beatrice long for a past with which they must reconcile; the warrior for justice, whatever this entails; Gawain has the unfinished business of slaying Querig, while the boy simply looks for his mother. Memories of the past are evasive and elusive. The journey's end will lead the couple to cross the water to an island, where they can only dwell together if they have an abiding love: an "abiding love that has endured the years". How will they prove their love for each other to the boatman if they can't remember their past? Increasingly, the couple come to fear both the damaging power of forgetting their shared past, and remembering its less ideal moments too. Their memory loss makes their love for each other less complex and spoiled. While they cannot remember the past, they also cannot remember the dark moments and sad moments of their past. The simple childlike love of their continual present, is changing as memories return, and could change as more memories do. Ishiguro's point here might be that people who do not remember their past cannot forgive each other even between two people in love. The end of the novel suggests their separation as all the

previous couples which the boatman had brought to the island had separated, and it makes the memory of their naïve simple and childlike love all the more poignant.

Works Cited:

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