

THE UNCONSCIOUS PAST: MEMORY, NOSTALGIA, AND TRAUMA IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *NEVER LET ME GO*

Dr. B. S. Arun¹, Mrs. S. Priyadarshini²

¹Assistant Professor of English, Erode Arts and Science College, Rangampalayam, Erode, Tamilnadu

²Research Scholar, Erode Arts and Science College, Rangampalayam, Erode, Tamilnadu

ABSTRACT

Memory is one of the few enduring remnants of human existence beyond the material possessions accumulated during a lifetime. It preserves the present and gradually becomes a recollection of the past. Everyday experiences and events are recorded as memories in the human mind, encompassing both positive and negative experiences. As time passes, memories that have had a significant impact on an individual often remain at the conscious level and can be retrieved, recollected, reminisced, or remembered. However, many memories become subdued or repressed within the unconscious mind due to attempts to forget or ignore traumatic past experiences, unresolved conflicts, and unfulfilled desires, corresponding to Freud's concept of "repression." Thus, memory is closely associated with the recollection of the past, bringing forth thoughts and experiences from both the conscious and unconscious realms of the human mind. Nostalgia, understood as a sentimental longing for the past, becomes an important dimension of memory. In Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, many characters dwell upon their nostalgic and traumatic past while confronting an inevitable and traumatic future. Employing a psychoanalytic lens, this paper examines how memory and nostalgia function as significant emotional forces that reveal the psychological depth of the characters and uncover the abyss beneath their illusory sense of connection with the world.

Keywords: Memory; Nostalgia, Repression, Psychoanalysis, Trauma, Unconscious Mind, Psychological Conflict, Interconnectedness, Inevitable Sadness

INTRODUCTION

Kazuo Ishiguro has become the recent sensation among the literary circle of the world as he bagged the Nobel Prize for literature in 2017. Even before getting the spotlight he got the Nobel Prize, he had already established himself as an outstanding writer with an excellent standard of writing. He was born on 8 th November 1954 in Nagasaki, Japan, nine years after the second atom bomb was dropped in Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. This means that his parents and family have survived the atom bomb. So, his very birth had a traumatic beginning and all through his life. His family moved to England in 1960 when Ishiguro was five years

*Corresponding Author Email: priyadarshini0630@gmail.com

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old. He was brought up in England, which makes him an English writer of Japanese origin. All his novels are preoccupied with the past and memory and how its characters brood over the past memories which have potential to shape and distort, to forget and silence, and above all to haunt the characters.

Ishiguro was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature by the Swedish Academy which praised his works for uncovering 'the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world.' This emotional force can be related to Aristotle's cathartic effect which means 'purgation of pity and fear.' Aristotle believed that poetry, in general literature, makes an immediate appeal to emotions. All of Ishiguro's novels have a tragic plot and an inevitable sadness in its core. When we read we could find ourselves being purged of our emotions by feeling pity for the characters and fearing what if it happens in our own life. In other words these emotions can also be stated as empathy and sympathy for the characters and their fates. His characters try to overcome the abysses and absences left by loved ones and lost family members by making sense of the past through acts of remembrance. His characters are mostly unreliable narrators who narrate the story recollecting from the past and sometimes they themselves doubt what they try bring out things, incidents from their memories. One of the principal themes in his novels is memory and past, whether it is the tragedy of the entire country or the tragedy of an individual.

The work which can be highlighted as a milestone in Ishiguro's literary carrier is his sixth novel, *Never Let Me Go*. Ishiguro mixes science fiction and dystopian fiction to write this novel. It is about three clones who in some speculative society are to donate the parts of their body to 'original' humans and at last to die. It has the extreme emotional force compared to all other Ishiguro's novel because the very idea of the clones purpose of living is 'to die,' moves the hearts of the readers. The novel tells the story of three clones, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy who are raised in a boarding school as future donors. The whole novel is told recollecting from the memory by Kathy. It's about their realization of who they are and their sole purpose of life. However the three try to avoid or postpone the donation, they couldn't make it. It is a tragic story that highlights the emotions and feelings of clones who are no different from the "so called original humans."

Firstly, this novel examines the neglected, marginalized, dehumanized, post-human clones who are confined within a societal system which excludes them without giving them a chance to prove their humaneness and the freedom to choose their own destiny. This novel can be seen as the development of the fantastical idea which was once given life by Mary Shelley in her novel, *Frankenstein*. In it she dealt with her imagination about the power of man to create a new living creature with the same feelings, emotions and intelligence like humans. Likewise, this novel raises the issues relating to humans' power to create a new life and also how the new creations are dehumanized, marginalized and mistreated by the "so called humans." Like other Ishiguro's novels this novel is also narrated by a first person narrator Kathy. H. When the novel begins, she is thirty one years old and has been a Carer for over eleven years to other clones who donate their body organs. It is from her memory and nostalgia for the past the whole of the novel is narrated through recollection. Memory here plays a significant role as it is the only evidence to interpret or understand the novel. These

memories of the narrator make the readers to question the comparative status of the clones and what it means to be a clone among the so called 'humans.' All through the novel, the clones try to prove their identity as human and breach the defined border between the so called 'human' and the clones. The very ideology that human 'psyche' which is the base of psychoanalysis is shattered as the question arises whether the clones have a soul, heart or psyche to give a psychoanalytical interpretation to this novel. The whole quest and struggle of the clones in this novel can be summed up as to prove that they too have a soul or psyche as human beings.

This novel questions how the technology might be put to use in the future with the advancements in technologies in the world. The novel set in an unspecified futuristic period in Britain where masses of clones are created as a remedy to solve human organs transplant. Thus the very idea of this system or practice that one has to lose their life for the benefits of others creates an emotional force, a kind of cathartic effect on the readers. Like most of Kazuo Ishiguro's novels, *Never Let Me Go*, is also full with memories and the female protagonist, Kathy H, tries to overcome her loss by making or creating the sense of past by reminiscing or through acts of remembrance. The novel introduces to the readers kind of euphemistic words like 'guardians' for the teachers in Hailsham school, 'Donation,' for the process of organ harvesting, 'Completion' for death because of donation of the organs, 'Carer' for the person who assists or takes care of the donors during their period of donation, and 'Normals' for those people who are benefitted because of the organ donation and who live in the outside world.

"As Kathy narrates the whole plot from the recollection of her memories, the readers are introduced to Tommy, Ruth, the concept of clones, donation, completion and Hailsham etc. The Autobiographical narration of Kathy begins with her self-introduction in the very opening lines of the novel: "My name is Kathy H. I am thirty one years old, and I have been a Carer now for over eleven years" (Ishiguro 03)

The novel begins from her recollection of memories about her childhood at Hailsham School. And the way the story is narrated makes her narration unique. ie. The time gap between the narrating Kathy and the experiencing self of Kathy as a child slowly narrows and her narration finally ends with the description of last experience about a trip she takes alone to Norfolk after the death of Tommy. The very recollection about her memories at the beginning of the novel happens in dramatic way. At the beginning, Kathy mentions about a donor who was placed under her care. Having finished three of his donation the donor was about to 'complete' or die. The donor is also a Hailsham student. So, he enquires Kathy about Hailsham so that he can reminisce the good old days he spent at that place and "remember Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood." (Ishiguro 05) This can be seen as a kind of Freudian displacement, whereby one person or event is represented by another which is in some way linked or associated with it, a kind of psychic transference of memories from one person to other. And these memories of Kathy displaced to the donor under her can be seen as surrogate memories. This is a kind of dream work in Freudian terms. Dream work is a process by which real events or desires are transformed into dream images or surrogate memories. This is the exact concept that Hollywood cinema director, Christopher Nolan has

dealt with in his movie “Inception,” that is, placing a person’s idea or memory into another person’s mind through a psychic transference called dream work in which the person who wants to incept an idea or memory go into the unconscious part of the patient or person under analysis through dream. And this very process of injecting a new idea or memory without the knowledge of the patient or person under analysis is called “inception.” And to make a person believe this incepted idea or memory is real and his own after the psychic transference or dream work, the inceptor creates layers of dream. i.e. dream into a dream, so that the incepted idea or memory will be placed at the person’s utmost unconscious and when the person think of that idea or remembers that memory, he or she thinks that it is his or her own idea or memory. This multiple layers of dream within a dream can be compared to the unconscious realm of a person which is the major reason for our unreasonable actions. This injected idea or memory becomes the screen memory of the person according to Freudian terms, that is, a trivial or inconsequential whose function is to obliterate a more significant one. In the movie, the injected idea or memory of a person is to become an independent businessman by his own effort, but not under the shade of his father’s already successful business which obliterates the whole idea or memory he had of becoming a successor to his father’s business. And in the novel, Kathy’s memories about Hailsham which is incepted or injected or displaced into the donor under her care obliterates the donors original memory about Hailsham and makes the person believe the incepted memory as his original memory about Hailsham or the past before the moments of his death. This very process can be seen as psychoanalysis, “a kind of therapy which aims to cure mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious part of the mind.”(Barry 96) In the movie, Inception, the inceptors are the psychoanalysts who read and analyse the mind of the person under inception or psychoanalysis and engineer a new idea or memory to solve their traumatic pasts or problematic future or an unresolved conflict or confusion and grafts it in the person’s unconscious mind through dream work. In the novel, Never Let Me Go, Kathy through the recollection of her childhood memories about Hailsham takes her donor to an unconscious state where her own memories are displaced into her donors mind and he start believing that it is his memory. We could see that in the lines:

“What he wanted was not just to hear about Hailsham, but to remember Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood. He knew he was close to completing and so that’s what he was doing: getting me to describe things to him, so they’d really sink in, so that maybe during those sleepless nights, with the drugs and the pain and the exhaustion, the line would blur between what were my memories and what were his.”(Ishiguro 05)

Kathy narrates that this donor who tried to sink her childhood memory to his own memory made her to stop her refrainment to look back at her past and makes her to start reminisce her days back at Hailsham. She says: “There have been times over the years when I have tried to leave Hailsham behind, when I have told myself I shouldn’t look back so much.” (Ishiguro 05) The desperate request of her donor shows how memory has a consolatory power and the link between death and memory.

The novel also concentrates on the collective innate memories in the clones which are also in the human beings. For instance, it highlights the memory, idea and fear of death that is

present in the clones which are innately present among the humans too. This memory is called as the racial memory or the Collective unconscious by Carl Jung. According to Jung “Collective unconscious refers to structures of the unconscious mind which are shared among beings of the same species. For him, the human collective unconscious is populated by instincts and by archetypes: universal symbols.... He considered the collective unconscious to underpin and surround the unconscious mind distinguishing it from the personal unconscious of Freudian psychoanalysis. He argued that the collective unconscious had profound influence on the lives of individuals, who lived out its symbols and clothed them in meaning through their experiences. The psychotherapeutic practice of analytical psychology revolves around examining the patient's relationship to the collective unconscious.” (Wiki)

In this novel, the clones, the marginalized, dehumanized section of the society can be seen as the same species like humans and they do have fear of death. One of the subtle attempts of this novel, Kathy, Ruth and Tommy is that to prove that they do belong to human species. We could see this in their desperate attempts to prove before Madame that their painting reveal their soul etc. And above all they prove that they do have death. And this fear of death, though donation of organs is their duty or sole purpose of life, is inherently present in their minds because of the collective unconsciousness of the human race. Each and everyone in this world is connected with others and we undergo the same problems, sorrows, happiness, achievements, tasks etc. which had been undergone by many in the past and will be faced by many in the future. This fear of death of clones and their sole purpose and survival is to die can be related to “Death Instinct or Death drive” of Freud. It is also called as “Thanatos” which means death in Greek.

Freud talks about this theory death drive in his work Beyond the pleasure principle, in which he says that the “goal or aim of life is death.” To substantiate his theory Freud pointed out that people who experienced traumatic past events would often reenact that experience. So, he came to conclusion that people hold an unconscious desire to die but the life instincts in them refrains them from dying and it is those who overcome that life instinct often commits suicide. And for the characters in the novel this reenaction can be equated with the recollection of memory about their past which also gives them a nostalgic feeling at last it makes them compare the happy life they once lived and the traumatic, marginalized, dehumanized life they are put to and treated as objects which makes them to hate their very existence of living and gives them an better option, that is, death. And this death drive is exactly what we see in this novel as all the clones whether willingly or unwillingly have to die one day for donating their organs. But, it could also be seen that many clones often willingly volunteer themselves to start their donations sometimes even before their period of donation begins. And those clones like Kathy, Ruth, Tommy etc who tried to go against this death drive, who tried to follow their “Life Instinct or Eros,” also finally gave up and yielded to their death drive. We could see this when Ruth after collecting the address of the Madame at last give it Ruth and Tommy to take a chance, when Tommy asks Kathy not be her Carer anymore after their meeting with Madame and Miss Emily. And the concept of “Memento Mori” which means “remember death” is prevailing all through the novel and Kathy, Ruth, Tommy and other clones although they have a period of time to live they always have this remainder of death.

Finally, Kathy clinging on to her past and memory can be seen as a struggle against the public or people's desire to forget. And her protest becomes more authoritative by positing the existence of a listener. Kathy's narration to the close of the book sets up a first person autobiographical narrative in a social and communicative framework. And the act of her narrating turns her personal memories into a historical memory or account, that is, something which will remain in people's memory and thus outlive Kathy's own life on earth. That is another important characteristics of memory which although holds no power against death, it allows people to live beyond their lives in the hearts and minds of others as a memory in a symbolic form forever. And it is because of memory we are what we are today. If it is that after one's loved one passes away and that is the end of the person and there would no memory of the person who passed away, would we able to lead a life further. For instance, among Swahali, a tribe in Kenya, East Africa, is a culture that where deceased who remain in the thoughts of others who are alive are called as "the living dead." Swahali people believe that those loved ones who had passed away are not considered to be completely dead until the last person who has known them die because they live in the memories of their loved ones who are still alive on this earth. Memory contains our past and it is the gateway to our future. By looking at the past, working on the present, we go into the future. And this cultural belief shows that the concept of human mortality can be understood as a subject or idea that covers a larger meaning than the physical, bodily existence. And in this novel we find the same as Kathy's story allows her to live on even after there comes an end to her physical body at one point or the other. This quality of memory is a significant factor behind the consolation and warmth that comes to the human mind while recollecting one's memory.

Kathy finds some solace from her memories of Hailsham. Her recollection is not just the remembrance of the past but it is also nostalgia for the past. All through the novel when Kathy narrates about Hailsham or about the time she had spent with Tommy, Ruth, or other friends at Hailsham, she feels nostalgia to be back there or to be back with them. And this nostalgia goes hand in hand with her memory as it is through memory one can have the feeling of nostalgia. And nostalgia is seen as a positive emotion by number of researchers. But it can also be seen as a mental exercise which accomplishes functions like self enhancement and strengthening relationships bonds. For instance, in this novel, it could be seen that Kathy's recollection of her past memories is a subtle treatment for present confused psychological state; her memories and nostalgia of the past are a kind of self- introspection that deepens her understanding of herself and the social surrounding in which she is in. This recollection of her past through memory and feeling nostalgic for it creates a sense of warmth, family, love and protection. Apart from the nostalgic feeling which she has for the past, she also recreates a bygone world to understand her past better. This arranging of one's past experiences and happenings and trying to understand it as a one whole thing is an act of establishing an identity for oneself. And in contrast to Kathy, who has seriousness about the exactness of the past when she recreates or recollects it from her memory, Ruth doesn't care for the preciseness of the past.

Furthermore, at the end of the novel it is possible to find a kind of spiritual tranquility and serenity in Kathy's attitude towards death. And the composed tone of Kathy gives the readers a strong extent of her suffering. In philosophy, this is called as Stoicism, that is the endurance

and acceptance of pain and suffering without any complain protest. And considering and metaphorically equating the conditions of the clones with the human race, Kathy's silent acceptance of her situation denotes the humans' capacity to accept what may seem like a cruel and limited fate.

As the beginning of the novel mainly focuses and narrates the characters' childhood we are introduced to the deep trauma that the clones are undergoing without them knowing their real fate which awaits them after they leave the school. Of course, they have been educated about what they should do after they leave the school, that is, to become a donor and start donating organs and complete or die. But as there are gaps in Kathy's narrative, the clones in the story are also not fully informed or educated about who they are, what the purpose of their upbringing is and why they do have to donate their organs and in what way they are different from the so called "humans." Right from the beginning of the novel there prevails a kind of emotional force which moves the readers and makes them more pitiful and also curious to know about the future of these clones. And the text positions the readers as people with similar situation like Kathy's and other clones and this is confirmed when Kathy uses phrases like "I don't know how it was where you were," and "I don't know if you had "collections" where you were." These phrases create a need for the narrator to explain when she talks about a certain aspect of their lives that are unique to their kind. And its result is gaps in the plot. It is only later in the novel these gaps are filled and makes the reader comprehend the earlier happenings.

All through the novel the dynamics of characters' memory which takes us in their own world of perception and feeling creates a kind of emotional force. The students or clones were brought up while they were in Hailsham telling them that they are special but here this specialty is a euphemism for the word "condemned."

"You have been told about it. You are students. You are special. So keeping yourselves well, keeping yourselves very healthy inside, that's much more important for each of you than it is for me." (Ishiguro 68)

And here their specialty for the clones is attributed not to them as a person or a living creature but to the parts or organs of their body. And also that they can't do certain things like smoking etc. because it will affect their body organs and it can be seen that if the "so called human" smokes it is not as much worse as it is for the clones. "But what you must understand is that for you, all of you, it is much worse to smoke than it ever was for me." (Ishiguro 68) This is because if the so called humans' organs fail because of smoking they can easily get organs transplanted from the clones. The Clones are even made to believe that donating their organs is the sole purpose of their life and if they complete or die at the first donation itself, it was considered as a shame and if they manage to cross their fourth donation it is considered as a sense of achievement among them. The readers could also find a sense emotional moving when they see how these clones do have the sense of motherhood even if they cannot get pregnant. For instance, once when Kathy listening to her favorite song, never let me go in her dorm, she grabbed a pillow and was swaying as she hears the song like holding an imaginary baby to her breast. She was doing this slow dance, her eyes closed, singing along with the song softly each time the lines 'oh baby, baby, never let me go' comes along. This one song

is so special to her, which is emotionally attached to Kathy and whenever she feels lonely and if no one is in her dorm, she plays the song and dances slowly to the song.

“What was so special about this song? Well, the thing was, I didn’t used to listen properly to the words; I just waited for that bit that went: ‘Baby, baby, never let me go...’ And what I’d imagine was a woman who’d been told she couldn’t have babies, who’d really, really wanted them all her life. Then there’s assort of miracle and she has a baby, and she holds this baby very close to her and walks around singing: ‘Baby, never let me go...’ partly because she’s so happy, but also because she’s so afraid something will happen, that the baby will get ill or be taken away from her.” (Ishiguro 70)

The above lines can be given a psychological interpretation as the expression of Kathy’s unconscious desire. Freud calls it as “‘Para praxis’, whereby repressed material in the unconscious finds an outlet through such everyday phenomena as slips of the tongue, slips of the pen, or unintended actions.” (Barry 94) Kathy’s unconscious desire to have a baby, her longing for motherhood which she cannot have as she is a clone deeply moves the readers and creates an emotional force in the above mentioned lines. And it can be taken that as a human representative in the fictional world of the novel, Madame, when she finds Kathy dancing slowly pretending to have a baby on her hands, she is heartbroken.

“I froze in shock. Then within a second or two, I began to feel a new kind of alarm, because I could see there was something strange about the situation. The door was almost half open- it was a sort of rule we couldn’t close dorm doors completely except for when we were sleeping- but Madame hadn’t nearly come up to the threshold. She was out in the corridor, standing very still, her head angled to one side to give her a view of what I was doing inside. And the odd thing was she was crying. It might even have been one of her sobs that had come through the song to jerk me out of my dream.” (Ishiguro 71)

Again a kind of catharsis is created while reading the above lines as it show an intensified pain of Madame looking at a pure soul, Kathy, who longs for motherhood unconsciously, which she can never attain. “‘Madame’s probably not a bad person, even though she’s creepy. So when she saw you dancing like that, holding your baby, she thought it was really tragic, how you couldn’t have babies. That’s, why she started crying.” (Ishiguro 72-73) And Tommy’s explanation to Madame’s reaction to that incident can be as the exactly correct perception of it. And this shows the reasoning and analytical abilities of the clones so like humans. The only difference that can be found as a difference between human beings and clones are the ability to reproduce. And without even having the ability to reproduce Kathy, Tommy and Ruth have proved that they do have a soul as like so called “humans.” And this is confirmed when Tommy and Ruth meets Madame and Miss Emily and gets to know that Hailsham is a campaign or an experiment to prove that clones do have soul.

“Let’s answer the simplest one, and perhaps it will answer all the rest. Why did we take your artwork? Why did we do that? You said it was because your art would reveal what you were like. What you were like inside. That’s what you said, wasn’t it? Well, you weren’t far wrong about that. 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.” (Ishiguro 254-255)

This very process of taking and looking at the art of the students by Madame can be seen as psychoanalysis to see the unconscious of the students to check whether they do have soul. The Gallery, a place according to Hailsham students where Madame takes their artwork, can also be a realm of human mind. As selective memories get subdued or repressed in the unconscious of the mind, students' selective artwork gets placed in the Gallery which is unaccessed by the conscious or by the students whose artwork is taken. Finally, the Madame and Miss Emily can be seen as the psychoanalyst who tries to bring out the real emotion, memory and soul of the students from their unconscious part of the mind by analyzing their art work which can be seen as the expression of their unconscious or soul.

SUMMATION

Thus, in this novel, *Never Let Me Go*, Kazuo Ishiguro has used memory and nostalgia as a major theme which fills the entire novel and moves the reader also into a pale, gloomy and melancholic state. We could find that memories do produce a moving emotional force quite often all through the novel, which unearths subtly and shows our i.e. the readers illusory sense of connection with the world. If we deeply analyze the reason why we mourn for the bombing of Syria and killing of thousands of people and children, why we are deeply heartbroken when there was Genocide against Tamil in Srilanka, we could find we have a sense of connection with the world, with humanity, with nature. Though it looks illusory, it is what we are made of, i.e. a sense of connection with the world. Every living thing in this world has emotions and memories which connects their souls as a unified, one soul of this universe. Thus, we could find an emotional force, a Cathartic effect, purgation of pity and fear when we read this novel which uncovers the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world.

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