

Navigating Post-Memory Crisis in Organ Donation in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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Abstract:

Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro delves deep into the intersections of memory transmission, identity, and moral dilemmas within an alternate reality where cloned humans are predestined for organ donations in Hailsham. Through the lens of post-memory, the 'second generation's' indirect experience of prior collective traumas this exploration highlights the clones' internal struggles with predetermined destinies and memories that aren't intrinsically theirs. While memories act as anchors, connecting clones to each other and offering solace, they also underscore their lack of agency and individuality. Ishiguro's work stands as a compelling testament to the role of memory in defining identity and value in life, challenging perceptions of what it means to be truly human.

Keywords: Memory Crisis, Transmission, Post-Memory, Fragility of Life, Manipulation of Memory.

Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* crafts a painful tale that intertwines organ donation with personal and social memory. In the seemingly pastoral setting of Hailsham, children are raised only to have their organs harvested in adulthood. This dystopia strips these "students" of any semblance of autonomy, a clear reflection of how the commodification of the human body has overpowering effects on identity and memory. Ishiguro's writing transports readers into a haunting alternate reality, where the peaceful exterior of the English countryside belies a horrifying truth that is a society built upon the commodification of human life through the callous practice of organ donation. Amidst this troubling backdrop, the narrative unfolds with detailed layers of memory and post-memory, provoking a profound exploration of the ethical dilemmas, the fragility of identity, and the implications of a world where the self is taken by systemic pragmatism.

As the characters of *Never Let Me Go* struggles with their close destinies as organ donors, they navigate through a landscape of recollections that serves both as a refuge and as a source of torment. Their experiences transcend the boundaries of personal memory, encapsulating

the concept of post-memory, a notion introduced by Marianne Hirsch that brings to light the impact of traumatic events on subsequent generations. This concept casts a new light on the characters' struggles, revealing the deep-rooted connection between memory, history, and identity. Novel Concentrates deeply into the intricate tapestry that Ishiguro has spun, exploring the convergence of post-memory and organ donation in the setting of this novel. "You've been told about it. You're students. You're...special. So, keeping yourselves well, keeping yourselves very healthy inside, that's much more important for each of you than it is for me" (*Never Let Me Go*68). We will analyse how the characters' memories and experiences are influenced by the collective trauma of their society through this study, and how this, in turn, impacts their perceptions of themselves and the outside world. Additionally, we will investigate the effects of such commodification of human existence on the moral issues surrounding organ donation and the broader effects it has on current debates about autonomy, consent, and societal ethics.

This study aims to not only determine the complexities of Ishiguro's story but also to promote a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between memory, identity, and the ethical fabric of a society ruled by functional motives by helping

the characters navigate through the post-memory crisis they experience within the unsettling world of organ donation. Here memory functions as both an anchor to personal identity and a chain that binds characters to their bleak realities. Throughout the narrative, Ishiguro skilfully weaves a tapestry that juxtaposes the comforting embrace of memory with the inherent need to forget. "After the fourth donation, even if you've technically completed, you're still conscious in some sort of way; how then you find there are more donations, plenty of them, on the other side of that line; how there are no more recovery centres, no carers, no friends; how there's nothing to do except watch your remaining donations until they switch you off" (*Never Let Me Go* 274). This dichotomy is explored primarily through the experiences of Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth as they confront their predetermined destinies in a world where their primary purpose is to donate organs.

Memory acts as a refuge for the students at Hailsham, memories offer a refuge, a glimpse into a past that provides an illusion of normalcy. "For students like you, I do feel regret. It gives me no pleasure at all to disappoint you" (*Never Let Me Go* 253). Moments like Kathy listening to the song *Never Let Me Go* or the children exchanging their artwork during the 'Exchanges' become pivotal memory points. These memories give them a sense of identity and connect them to a time when their futures were not yet fully realized. Such memories serve as a testament to their humanity, emphasizing their desires, dreams, and emotions, much like anyone else. They allow the characters a fleeting escape from their grim futures. Forgetfulness as the survival Mechanism Yet, there's a necessary compulsion to forget, or at least to suppress certain memories. The knowledge of their eventual "completion" after a series of organ donations creates a looming shadow over their lives. This knowledge is so traumatic that the cognitive clashes it produces and makes forgetfulness seem attractive, if not essential. The system, too, encourages a level of forgetfulness. Hailsham, with its emphasis on art and creativity, arguably serves to distract students from their ultimate fate. "The idea was that when the time came, you'd be able just to unzip a bit of yourself, a kidney or something would slide out,

and you'd hand it over. It wasn't something we found so funny in itself; it was more a way of putting each other off our food. You unzipped your liver, say, and dumped it on someone's plate, that sort of thing" (*Never Let Me Go* 86).

The Dual Role of Hailsham itself is a paradoxical institution. While it serves as the nurturing ground for these memories, it also operates as the genesis of their preordained destinies. Hailsham's seeming benevolence, in offering a relatively privileged upbringing, contrasts starkly with the truth that the institution is preparing its students for their inevitable fate as organ donors. Thus, even the cherished memories of Hailsham are tainted by the knowledge of the school's true purpose. One of the concepts that reverberate through the text, although not named explicitly, is the idea of post-memory it is a term been formulated by Marianne Hirsch to describe the way trauma experienced by one generation can deeply affect subsequent generations. In the novel, this notion is implicitly woven into the narrative through the experiences of the students or clones. "Post memory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present." (Marianne Hirsch, 2012).

Post-memory is a term primarily associated with memory and trauma studies, introduced by scholar Marianne Hirsch in her exploration of Holocaust narratives and the ways in which its traumatic memories were passed to subsequent generations. The concept has since been expanded to encompass various contexts of trans-generational trauma and memory transmission.

"'Post memory' describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (Marianne Hirsch, 2012).

The clones' understanding of their purpose is gradually revealed to them as they grow

older. Their memories of Hailsham are tinged with a haunting realization that they were never given a choice. While they “remember” learning about their organ donor roles, they never truly provided informed consent, emphasizing the ethical dilemma of determining autonomy based on memory and understanding.

The broader society in Ishiguro’s world seems to suffer from a collective amnesia regarding the origins and implications of the organ donation system. By not remembering (or choosing to forget) the ethical foundation on which the system was built, society absolves itself from the moral responsibility of using clones for organ acquiring. Here, memory (or the lack thereof) becomes an ethical shield. As the clones confront their inevitable futures, the memories of their peers who ‘completed’ early become traumatic. These memories serve as stark reminders of their fate, leading to internal dilemmas about the value of their lives. Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* provides a harrowing exploration into the depths of inherited trauma, societal expectations, and the intricate dance between memory and identity.

Through the lens of organ donation, the narrative raises profound questions about the commodification of human life, forcing readers to confront the fragility of what it means to be human. The concept of post-memory, as reflected in the characters’ inherited fates and traumas, further underscores the weight of past decisions on present realities. In this world, the “students” bear the burden of a choice they never made, exemplifying the typical post-memory crisis. Their lives, intertwined with both the past they did not choose and the future they cannot escape, serve as a sharp reflection of the potential dangers of societal utilitarianism. The echoes of their struggles resonate deeply, shedding light on the broader questions of autonomy, the ethics of sacrifice, and the everlasting impact of collective memory on individual destinies.

Conclusion:

The title encapsulates two significant aspects of the novel: the concept of post-memory and the thematic importance of organ donation. Together, they provide a comprehensive lens to view the narrative’s overarching themes. The use of the

word ‘navigating’ in the title indicates a journey or exploration. This is fitting given that the characters in the novel, and indeed the readers themselves, traverse a path of understanding, discovery, and acceptance regarding their destinies and the implications of their society’s choices, it also suggests a deep, multi-faceted exploration rather than a surface-level analysis. By choosing such a title, readers can anticipate a rich, layered discussion that engages with both the emotional landscape of the characters and the broader societal implications of their world.

Through the lens of post-memory, the novel can be viewed as a reflection of real-world scenarios where individuals grapple with the legacies left behind by preceding generations. This could range from historical atrocities, colonial legacies, or societal decisions that have long-lasting effects. Understanding the trauma and experiences of the characters through this theory amplifies the emotional resonance of the novel. It provides readers with a richer comprehension of the characters’ internal landscapes, making their journeys, relationships, and ultimate fates even more moving. If humans can inherit the memory of clowns what will be the consequence? In future studies this novel can be examined through post-humanitarian, traumatic studies.

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