

Kathy H's Identity and the Readers' Role in Kazuo Ishiguro's - *Never Let Me Go*

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Kazuo Ishiguro's novels are pregnant with polychromatic interpretations. An array of vibrant and carefully positioned nodes weaves his narrative sequences. *Never Let Me Go* (2005) showcases memory as a predominantly intriguing perspective. The story is mostly covered up by the narrator's flashbacks. Ishiguro fashions the text with ample gaps stimulating an active and creative participation of the reader. This paper attempts to re-read the novel examining the author's pnetotechniques applied on the implied reader to control and manipulate reading. The reader is therefore engaged in hermeneutic effort in working up Kathy H.

This 2005 Booker nomination is a dystopian science fiction. It is set in a contra-factual version of England in the 90's, reproductive cloning having been introduced in the 70's. The narrator, a female clone named Kathy H, 31, recalls her life in a 'privileged' clone rearing institution. Her perspective matures into a sole viable mode of comprehending the ongoing events. The plot involves Kathy recalling her past as she tries to make meaning out of her ticking-bomb of an existence purely engineered to cater to the organ harvesting farms. The narrative is co-creative, with fertile gaps and silences. It not only unfolds but interacts with the reader who assists in concretizing the schematic narration. A simple example by reception theorist Wolfgang Iser serves to explain the approach as well as the limitations of this paper:

The impressions that arise as a result of this process [reader reading a text] will vary from individual to individual, but only within the limits imposed by the written as opposed to the unwritten text. In the same way, two people gazing at the night sky may both be looking at the same collection of stars, but one will see the image of a plough, and the other will make out a dipper. The 'stars' in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable. (287)

The narrative is pillared with five nodes and a revelation episode. Here, the nodes are referred to as: 'doner-carer', 'the Gallery', 'Judy Bridgewater tape', 'possible-deferral' and 'Halisham'. Most of these are very common terms defamiliarized with a dark bent. These five foci serve the dual purpose of injecting a gripping interest and providing contextual contents that add up to build Kathy's identity. The novel slow-slices the body of the characters, simultaneously integrating their personalities into the missing bits. As a result the end sees the characters deprived of their bodies but leaving a lasting imprint on the reader's mind. The contents are set patterns of conversation; be it conflict or reconciliation, hopes or impediments of Kathy. Nonetheless, she thrives more in the narrative silences. The deductions evoked by the "response-inviting structure" of the text catches the reader off-guard with mistaken anticipations in the climax. These mistakes, as Staley Fish argues "are part of the experience provided by the author's language".

To begin with the title 'Never Let Me Go', one is anticipating a love story. The lucid narrative is full of personal remarks making one easier to follow and connect with the protagonist. However, a cursory reading of the very first page finds the reader in uncharted waters. Euphemistic words such as 'carer', 'donor', 'complete', etc., crop up. It takes little effort, thereafter, to face the truth of the leading character. She is a clone. However, it is to be noted that the term 'donour' is equated with the idea of someone 'giving' something. But it is a mechanical gesture for the clones who are offered neither choice nor voice. The author does away with the connotations of force by using the term 'donour' because this is perhaps not meant to be a novel of resistance but a unique love story.

On a general note, Josie Gill, a Cambridge scholar working on race and genetics in contemporary British fiction observes that the advancement in the field of genetic engineering and bio-technology have urged reproductive cloning to seep into mainstream literature and popular culture consequently evoking scholarly pursuits. Nonetheless, "reproduced human clone" is still a myth and the idea of engineering one is neck deep in controversy regarding various ethical, psycho-physiological, socio-political and religious issues. What will be the precise nature of a clone? What will be the relationship with his/her (if we refrain from addressing a clone as an "it") original? What greater purpose can this process serve other than harvesting organs? Will they have a right to vote? Will it be a mutiny against Nature and God? If it is their body, who is 'entitled to offer it up'?

The problematization of Kathy's identity ruptures the covalency of the reader and Kathy rendering her as an 'other'. She is dehumanized and looked upon as something not 'real' and belonging to a different space-time-continuum. Her identity becomes that of a specimen functioning in an alternate history monitored from a safe distance. A simple analogy can be drawn thus: in MS Office Word, if one attempts to type the sentence "she is a clone who is in search of her identity" the inbuilt grammar underlines the 'who' and prompts to replace it with a 'which'.

The 'donor-carer' node dishes out the intricacies involved in the reproductive cloning programme. After graduating from Halisham, the 'privileged' institution, the clones either start to donate or personally 'care' for the 'donors' till they 'complete' or die from their recurrent donations. The unexpected turn of events excites interest. The narrative content of this node constructs the nature of the clone named Kathy right from her childhood days at Halisham. Unlike any other autobiography which generally presents birth or parentage as the oldest memory of an individual, Kathy recalls her first encountering with Ruth as childhood playmates as the earliest thing she could remember. Devoid of any parental figure and raised by the 'guardians' in conditions akin to chicks in a poultry farm, the clones had only each other to look up to and look out for. Ruth was playing a game with invisible horses, the names of which Kathy remembers along with the antics of little Ruth. She paints a lively picture from her memory of the day she meets Tommy. She minutely describes the crowd, the exact shades on Tommy's face as he shook with anger on being tricked at the annual football team selection, the shirt he was wearing, her feelings and much more. Kathy is observant. She indulges in empathetic engagement with her fellow students. She is emotional, cares deeply for her only friend Ruth and likes Tommy. Passing reference is made to the other inmates of Halisham but none play as major roles in Kathy's life as Ruth and Tommy. This hints at her selective nature. Wading through towards the deeper layers of the plot, Ruth enters into a romantic relationship with Tommy. From hence the conversations and descriptions concerning Tommy as recollected by Kathy start breaking off at potent junctures. Her words devoid of passion pour out mechanically. It is presupposed to cater with information necessary to fully grasp the pulse of the moment, as accomplished earlier. The reader's conditioned reflex hunts for an explanation. Previously, information was duly identified and analyzed but lack of it when most expected generates a flux. Reception theorists would label it as the unwritten portion of the text which induces the readers to work up rest of the human Kathy: She is in love with Tommy and digs a grave out of her memoir burying her romantic hopes for him in order to hold onto the only friend Kathy valued, Ruth.

Reference to the freshly engaged couple diminishes as the plot rolls onto the second node: The Gallery. Earlier in the novel one comes across one of Kathy's sad memories: six year old Tommy being humiliated in class for drawing a pathetic picture of an elephant amidst tall grass. Henceforth, he was picked on by other students. His naïve anger on being tricked and gulled at every opportunity earned him the tag 'clown of the class'. A frustrated Tommy gave up creating 'art'. Halisham made it mandatory for all to create works of art, be it painting, handicrafts, etc. Incapable of so doing was looked upon as a characteristic flaw. The best of the lot was collected by a French woman referred to as 'Madame' for her *Gallery*. None of the students had ever seen it and the reference to the Gallery was a taboo. Madame would turn up two to four times a week for this purpose. This node creates a suspense regarding these 'artifacts'. Why is it so important to create them? Why and to where are they taken away? Nothing more is said but with Ishiguro the reader anticipates a larger purpose and awaits the revelation. This node also serves the purpose of posing the first question concerning Kathy's identity in the novel. It was only after Ruth's declaration that 'Madame' was afraid of the students that Kathy, Ruth and their gang of girls ambushed Madame to see her reaction. 'Madame' "froze and waited for us to pass by". She was suppressing a shudder and her face betrayed a "dread that one of us would accidentally brush against her." This was the first time Kathy looked at herself from the point of view of a normal person. It took her only a glance at Madame's face to comprehend her own 'other-ness', the way she was looked upon as an organism rather than a human being by the normal people of her reality. This was solely due to the process by which she was 'manufactured', one in which she had no say. Here Kathy directly addresses the readers: "I'm sure somewhere in your childhood, you too had an experience like ours that day; similar... in feelings" (36). One is deeply moved at the suddenness of the realization that after all has been said and done she is still a clone. Her plight enkindles sympathy as the reader re-bonds with Kathy. The first person narration adds to this effect and draws upon the reader's personal range of experiences confirming to the universal truth of coming to terms with the hard facts of life in the process of growing up.

The third node is occasioned with the mention of the Judy Bridgewater Tape. At this point Kathy and the reader are on an equal plain if not the very same. The fictitious cassette tape named *Songs after the Dark* by Judy Bridgewater also an imaginary singer is one of the secret possessions of Kathy. She plays it when no is watching. Each time she listens to track number three, she waltzes to the lyrics 'o baby, o baby, never let me go' with gestures of cradling an infant. One evening Kathy witnesses Madame staring at her from the corridor (unlocking a door was forbidden), weeping silently. On being aware of Kathy's attention she runs away from the scene. One is left at sea as to the reason behind such sorrow and abruptness on Madame's part until the revelation scene. Prior to this incident the rea

Readers are made aware of the fact that the female clones are forbidden to conceive under any circumstances because it hampers or changes the desired formation of the organs of the body. Ishiguro constructs this node with care and precision so as to keep the element of curiosity afloat. Side by side Kathy lets the reader enter her extremely private moment binding them with a seal of trust. As Margaret Atwood contemplates, "It's as if Kathy has invested a lot of her sense of self in things quite far away from her own body, and thus less likely to be injured." (3) One wonders at her transformation from being a clone to being a baby girl locked up in a walled institution, oblivious to all the cruelties life has yet to offer, waiting to be taken apart bit by bit. The sense of innocence and pure joy driven home with nostalgia fills in the remaining gap between the reader and the character. The unwritten takes command. This tape, however, consequently gets lost only to turn up at a very intricate juncture in the novel.

The fourth node awaits Ruth meeting her 'possible'. A normally born human who is cloned via stem cells donation is the 'possible' of the clone. This node builds the lifestyle of clones. After graduating from Halisham, they are moved to a cottage where they stay before 'being chosen' to be a donor or a carer. Kathy, now a teenager, has had sex. Her growing urge to have more makes her confide in Ruth. When Ruth bosses around condemning her lust, Kathy shuffles through porn magazines to look for her 'possible'. Locating her 'possible' would render Kathy with a definite point of origin, a twisted but rigid sense of self

andbelonging. They would be nearest to the idea of a father or a mother who would vouch for Kathy's existence. Ruth turns out to be an opportunistic and manipulative character. Kathy in contrast is welcome with the reader pitied for her ignorance and insecurity on realizing Ruth's trickery. As the tension is built regarding the aftermath of an encounter with Ruth's 'possible' the readers unconsciously accommodates the sweet note as Kathy grows close to Tommy. The trip to Norfolk with senior clones Chrissie and Rodney serves a two-fold purpose. The readers' expectations are frustrated at Ruth's failed attempt to identify her 'possible' and therefore the now conscious interest shifts. One witnesses Kathy with all her guards down as Tommy buys her a copy of the lost Judy Bridgewater tape. Tommy opens up to Kathy sharing his theory linking the Gallery and the 'deferral' program. Deferral was a rumour when Kathy was in Halisham. It was supposed to be a postponement of the donation procedure if two clones were in love with each other. The concerned authorities, as the whispers said, would let them live together for three to four years before starting as 'donors' or 'carers'. The works of art that went into the Gallery are supposedly the key to reveal something about the souls of the clones. A quick review and comparison would convince the authorities of the genuine love a clone heart harbours and thus sanction a deferral. But the readers are well aware that Tommy gave up creating art since his humiliation. A renewed attempt commences to finish a love-story as the readers now hope along with Kathy and Tommy to look out for a 'deferral'.

The next node is unique and can be termed as 'Halisham'. Although being one of the first singular things to be mentioned in the novel, it is layered a little at a time and flows as an undercurrent of inter-nodes. It surfaces with its accumulated potentialities to resonate in unison with the other nodes in the revelation scene. The clones were brought up at Halisham: a spacious prison with fields, lakes, galleries, pavilions and landscapes inched with greenery. Kathy in her memories refers time and again to Halisham. She recalls the seasonal changes the flora and the sunlight underwent. The guardians who engaged the students in regular classes discussing history, literature and arts never showed any resemblance to a parental figure. Miss Emily, the principal and head guardian disliked indiscipline of thought and action, dreading mutiny. Now, her time as a 'carer' finds Kathy motoring through the countryside. Certain fields, barbed-wire fences or a particular arrangement of trees reminds her of Halisham. It provides her with a sense of belonging to a place if not a person. Later, when she learns of Halisham likely to be decommissioned, she is agonized. She compares herself and her friends like a bunch of balloons converging at a closed palm about to open. One moment they are "a little tribe" and the next sees them disowned and scattered as Halisham shuts down. Kathy's sense of alienation compels her to grip firmly onto whatever acknowledges her existence and restores her sense of belonging. She tracks down Ruth recovering from her first donation and cares for her through her second which she fails to survive. The reader, by now, has imbibed Kathy. The negligible reference to surgical procedure and gory details has eased the one's consciousness into doing away with the sense of 'otherness' with reference to Kathy as primarily induced. Henceforth, the reader consciously substrates Kathy.

The revelation scene, the penultimate chapter, is where the author pulls in his fishing net. The nodes converge. Ruth before succumbing to her wounds asks forgiveness as she hands Kathy a paper with Madame's address imploring her to apply for the 'deferral' with Tommy. They venture to meet Madame, the art collector and inadvertently meets Miss Emily, the principal, queuing up the revelation scene.

Here, one finds the missing pieces of the puzzle. The cloning industry considered their products as entities. Conceived in laboratories, the clones are generally raised in inhuman circumstances. Halisham was shut down because they worked as an NGO in order to provide the clones with a more humane life. They organized all sorts of charity programmes, raised money, and publicly displayed the drawings, paintings, poems and other pieces of art. They started gaining media coverage as well as sympathy:

"There look!" we could say. "Look at this art! How dare you claim these children are anything less than fully human?" (256)

Love is very natural to everything that is naturally created. On the contrary, with respect to artificially engineered subjects love is but an obstacle especially when it can jeopardize the very purpose i.e. organ harvesting. The *real* human beings are not prepared to sympathize with medical subjects created to donate organs to "their own children, their spouses, their parents and cure their mothers' cancers." Miss Emily's confession throws ample light on the issue:

'... We took away your best 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.*'

... 'Why did you have to prove a thing like that, Miss Emily? Did someone think we didn't have soul?' (255)

The readers who are now wound up with Kathy are taken aback when they realize that the very existence of Kathy's soul is in question. The identity of an individual human being which the reader has been building up so far carving with nuances, polishing with emotions and coating with a bit of hope here, a sigh there, suddenly threaten to disintegrate. Indirectly, surrounded by the intricacies of all the nodes, the readers cannot unhinge themselves from Kathy. Therefore they react as one. The 'gallarey', 'deferral' along with all the hopes and speculations of Kathy, Tommy and the reader, reach a nadir of disappointments.

The incident of the mysterious waltz session of young Kathy is too resolved as Madame recounts her version of the memory. She saw a child holding onto our dear old world and asking it never let her go. Madame's interpretation perfects the application of dramatic irony in the novel. Reference to an old memory and its tender rendition reinvigorates the element of nostalgia and doubles the tragic impact.

The boundaries between the different realities collapse and Kathy as a clone becomes an ultimate 'metaphor for the human condition'. Born with the certainty of death and filled with an abyss of emotions Kathy champions her cause by accepting her fate. The readers, on the other hand find themselves guilty of identifying with the normal people of Kathy's reality who look down upon Kathy as a mere scientific specimen. "...[We visualize] ourselves, seen through a glass, darkly" (Atwood). The construction and reconstruction of Kathy throughout the text gnaws at the reader's conscience as the novel closes. The end evokes the conclusion of Maurya in Syngé's *Riders to the Sea*: No man can be living forever and we must be satisfied." Her staying with Tommy and caring for him until he 'completes' after his fifth donation is reminiscent of us caring for our dying spouses at a ripe old age. The only difference is that 'their life is very short and to the point'.

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Declaration

I, Kasturi Sinha Ray, declare that the paper is an original work and has not been published or is under consideration elsewhere.

Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro impregnates his novels with multiple strands of interpretations which steers the reader's engagement with the symbiotic nodes and internodes. The character of the protagonist Kathy H in the novel *Never Let Me Go*, evolves through the readers' response to this nodal structure. Memory functions as one of the most intriguing perspective. The novel is a dystopian science fiction by Ishiguro which was nominated for the 2005 Booker Prize. Set in a contra-factual version of England, the plot revolves round Kathy H, a cloned woman in her thirties 'called' Kathy who reminisces her past and tries to make meaning out of her unique circumstances at present. The dynamic narrative provides gaps and silences for the readers to fill and interact. Wolfgang Iser's refers to the scripted and the unwritten portions of the text which together communicate with the reader's 'expectations' to bring out the 'meaning'. Readers can identify such patterns set at regular intervals among the conversations and recollections of Kathy. They break off at potent crossroads where it is pre-supposed to serve the readers with contextual information as primarily provided. The reader's conditioned reflex hunts for an explanation. They want of necessary details in order to better access the situation at hand works up a flux. Therefore, the readers start to respond by fashioning the identities of the characters in accordance to their individual imagination. Kathy steals all the spotlight in the fiction. It is through her gaze that the readers comprehend the events of the novel. The reader not only creates the identity of Kathy from the tale but is also caught off guard by what the text doesn't tell.

Key Words: Ishiguro, Iser, Identity, Reader, Reader-Response, Reception, Interpretation, Hermeneutics

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Kasturi Sinha Ray is presently registered with a PhD programme affiliated to Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Banaras Hindu University. She is a career first class, graduating from University of Kalyani and completing her M.A. from BHU. She is currently researching in the field of memory studies with respect to both the readers and the characters in the fictions of Kazuo Ishiguro. She has directed and acted in multiple plays both Hindi and English.

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