

Outburst of Emotions in Kazuo Ishiguro's : The Remains of the Day and Never Let Me Go

TAKETOMI, Ria
Gifu Pharmaceutical University : Professor

<https://doi.org/10.15017/4480676>

出版情報 : *Comparatio*. 24, pp.4-13, 2020-12-28. Society of Comparative Cultural Studies, Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies, Kyushu University

バージョン :

権利関係 :

Outburst of Emotions in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let Me Go*

TAKETOMI Ria

Introduction

Most of the protagonists in Kazuo Ishiguro's novels talk calmly, oppressing their feelings in a first narrator style. They look back to the past and talk about their hazy memories and emptiness. However, there are times, particularly in separation scenes, when their emotions burst out. For example, in *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens keeps his dignity as a butler until he meets Miss Kenton. He never confesses his feelings to her. After seeing Miss Kenton to the bus stop and concealing himself for two days, Stevens visits Weymouth. He becomes uneasy when talking to a stranger and starts weeping as he discusses his remorseful life. In *Never Let Me Go*, when Tommy and Kathy learned the fact that there is no "deferral"¹ for Hailsham students, Tommy shouts in rage in the dark on the way home. At that time, Tommy had already given his third organ donation, so he knew "completion" or death was approaching and that he has to let Kathy go forever. This article compares separation scenes in *The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let Me Go*. By examining the protagonists' emotional outbursts and acceptance process, a significant difference becomes apparent.

1. *The Remains of the Day*

At the beginning of *The Remains of the Day*, the butler, Stevens, asks his new American employer if he could take some time off. He wants to visit his old colleague, Miss Kenton to see if she is available for working as a housekeeper again. While he makes his way to Miss Kenton, he reminisces about the days when they were working together. He talks about some scenes where he avoided being intimate with Miss Kenton because of his strong belief in the decorum of his role as a butler. For example, Miss Kenton brings a vase of flowers to Stevens's room at night. As she opens the door, she sees Stevens hiding a book. She asks what he was reading, but he does not reply. Miss Kenton approaches Stevens many times in affectionate ways, but Stevens always maintains a distance

between himself and her.

There is another scene, which Stevens calls it "a cocoa meeting" that exhibits Stevens's clumsy behaviour. After the day's work, Stevens and Miss Kenton had a cup of cocoa and reviewed the day together. They shared information and talked about various things. One day, Miss Kenton just answered his questions inattentively. Other days, she asked if she could call the day off because she was tired. Stevens knew that she was seeing a man outside, a former butler who she used to work with, and exchanging letters. Therefore, Stevens was not happy with it. His irritation grew and he finally revealed his emotion unexpectedly. Stevens asked Miss Kenton to cease having the cocoa meeting unilaterally. Instead of meeting face to face, he suggested her to leave written messages at one another's doors. He recalls that moment as follows:

Naturally—and why should I not admit this?—I have occasionally wondered to myself how things might have turned out in the long run had I not been so determined over the issue of our evening meetings; that is to say, had I relented on those several occasions over the weeks that followed when Miss Kenton suggested we reinstitute them. I only speculate over this now because in the light of subsequent events, it could well be argued that in making my decision to end those evening meetings once and for all, I was perhaps not entirely aware of the full implications of what I was doing. Indeed, it might even be said that this small decision of mine constituted something of a key turning point; that the decision set things on an inevitable course towards what eventually happened. (184)

There is a tone of remorse in Stevens's voice. He calls it, "a key turning point" and before reviewing the incident, he says, "Why should I not admit this?" People usually use this phrase before confessing their true feelings to the third party. Stevens knew in his heart that if he had continued having the cocoa meeting, he could not have tolerated suppressing his affectionate emotion towards Miss Kenton, and he could not maintain the distance anymore. He is indeed admitting if he did not ignore her they could have been together now. This is surely a signal phrase before confessing his true feelings. As Brian Shaffer says, the fact that, "Stevens

fails to overcome his sexual repression is equally clear. This fact is mirrored in the 'ferocious downpour' of rain the 'ominous stormclouds,' the 'gloomy' light, and the subsequent 'drizzle' (232, 238) that surround the present meeting between Stevens and Kenton." (85) As Shaffer says, their relationship was starting to fall apart.

When further examining the cocoa incident from a different perspective, it is obvious that Stevens deliberately brought the subject up. Right before he started mentioning this, he referred to his occupation. Being a butler requires certain qualities and that "the profession isn't for everybody". (181) Miss Kenton ponders for a moment and asks him what he wishes for his life. Without clearly getting to the point, Stevens boasts about his profession as follows:

As far as I am concerned, Miss Kenton, my vocation will not be fulfilled until I have done all I can to see his lordship through the great tasks he has set himself. The day his lordship's work is complete, the day he is able to rest on his laurels, content in the knowledge that he has done all anyone could ever reasonably ask of him, only on that day, Miss Kenton, will I be able to call myself, as you put it, a well-contented man. (182)

Stevens is proud of his job and never had a doubt about his employer. However, soon after this scene, Stevens talks about the moment of declining the cocoa meeting with Miss Kenton. Stevens describes how she seemed confused and tried to convince Stevens to continue the meetings, but he ignored her completely. Why did Stevens recall these two scenes one after another? It is Ishiguro's intention to make the reader think how repentant Steven is. When Ishiguro delivered a Nobel Lecture in Stockholm on December 7, 2017, he referred to Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* saying, "I could place a scene from two days ago right beside one from twenty years earlier, and ask the reader to ponder the relationship between the two." (46) He placed these two scenes deliberately to show the consequence of Stevens's clumsy pride and to show how his strong professionalism made Miss Kenton go.

Stevens finally meets Miss Kenton and asks her if she is interested in the job opening. Miss Kenton then gives Stevens an answer, which disheartens him. She says, "I get to thinking about a life I might have had

with you, Mr Stevens. And I suppose that's when I get angry over some trivial little thing and leave. But each time I do so, I realize before long—my rightful place is with my husband.”(251) Stevens cannot answer immediately after hearing this. After a while, Stevens admits there was a certain degree of sorrow and talks to himself, “Indeed—why should I not admit it?—at that moment, my heart was breaking.”(252) Stevens again uses the signal phrase, “why should I not admit it?” before revealing his true feelings. Barry Lewis states that, “It is at this point that Steven’s façade crumbles and he is left emotionally exposed.”(97) Stevens, however, does not show his sorrow to Miss Kenton. Brian Shaffer points out that Stevens “literally smiles at her even though his heart is breaking.”(86)

Stevens could not deliver his feelings to Miss Kenton. He was more devastated after hearing, “Yes, I do love my husband,” (251) from Miss Kenton herself. When Stevens was seeing her off at the bus stop, he perceives Miss Kenton’s “eyes had filled with tears.” (252) James Phelan and Patricia Martin say, “Her tears, then, signify her own recognition that if he’d acted this way twenty years before, her life would be different.” (106) However, he was still the butler and could not take off his mask in front of her. However, two days after her departure, Stevens visits Weymouth in the evening. He sits where he could watch people gathering on the pier. He recalls the moment and says there was a stranger sitting next to him. The stranger told him that the evening was the best part of the day, “the part they [people] most looked forward to.” (253) Then the stranger noticed something and said, “Oh dear, mate. Here, you want a hankie?” (255) It is obvious that Stevens is shedding tears, and the stranger handed him a handkerchief. Stevens did not care about how he would be seen by a third party anymore. He confesses almost like a monologue:

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? (255-256)

This is his conclusive feeling. He cared too much about his occupation and dignity, pride, and greatness. He even projected them on the landscape of England and onto his father's eloquent stories. The stranger dispels Stevens' opinion and tells him, "Don't keep looking back all the time, you're bound to get depressed. And all right, you can't do your job as well as you used to. But it's the same for all of us, see? We've all got to put our feet up at some point." (256) Satoshi Ando states that from the "words from Miss Kenton and the stranger, Stevens was able to find a vision of the future." (57; my translation) At the end of the story, he decides to practice American jokes for his new employer saying, "I should hope, then, that by the time of my employer's return, I shall be in position to pleasantly surprise him." (258). Stevens accepted the loss of love and chose to live positively for the remainder of his days.

2 . *Never Let Me Go*

Many people might cite one of the most impressive separation scenes in *Never Let Me Go* as Kathy leaving Ruth and Tommy behind at the Cottages. The three of them had always been together since their childhood days but the conflict between Kathy and Ruth became severe after the day-trip to Norfolk. Kathy had pent-up anger regarding Tommy, which she never expressed publicly. Ruth became jealous after witnessing Kathy and Tommy's intimacy after the trip. She played a trick with Kathy about Tommy's creative images. Tommy was so proud of his drawings and Kathy knew how he felt about them. However, Ruth claims, "It's not just me, sweetie. Kathy here finds your animals a complete hoot." (192) and "Kathy and I have a good laugh about you." (192) Kathy did not cry or lose her temper during this conversation. Instead, she decided to "turn and go." (193) When she made this decision, she says, "I feared more than anything was that one or the other of them would stalk off first, and I'd be left with the remaining one. [...] So I turned and marched back the way I'd come, [...] I felt as though I'd triumphed; that now they'd been left in each other's company, they were suffering a fate they thoroughly deserved." (193) The

interesting point here is that Kathy was feeling she had “triumphed.” Bruce Robbins thinks Kathy’s cruelty in this scene is indistinguishable from caring and states:

Kathy’s cruelty would seem to make more sense not as a general fact of human nature but as a response to a particular historical situation. It would make sense as her sole and unique expression of anger [...] leaving her own needs and desires out of play, has been more of her genuine attractions both as a character and as a narrator. It certainly makes her as convincing as she is. (300)

As Robbins mentions, Kathy’s silence is her way of expressing anger. In addition, leaving both Ruth and Tommy is her way of expressing anger in action. However, why was Kathy afraid of being left alone at the Cottages with one of the two? She did not even want to be together with Tommy.

In the past Ishiguro called the children at Hailsham the “ultimate orphans” in his interview with Atsuko Tatsuta. He further said, “I think the stories that I write have always been a love story. There are male and female love stories but mostly the love between parents and children. An orphan is a metaphor of lack of love. The lack of love is the same or much stronger emotion than love.” (253; my translation) If children at Hailsham were the metaphor for a lack of love as Ishiguro describes, they might not have known what love is in the first place. To prove that Kathy thinks leaving Ruth and Tommy was her task. Kathy, Ruth and Tommy may know what it is like to be together as close friends as brothers and sisters, but it is quite not the same as kin or intimate male and female relationships as humans. It could be similar to “Something that will just be there, always, like tomorrow’s sky.” (227) as Sarah, in *When We Were Orphans* describes her relationship with Christopher Banks. Kathy, Ruth and Tommy maintained a triangular relationship by supporting each other, but the tie they had was weak. Kathy seemed to be surprised about it as well and says, “It never occurred to me that our lives, until then so closely interwoven, could unravel and separate over a thing like that.” (194) She further confessed: “[T]he fact was, I suppose, there were powerful tides tugging us apart by then, and it only needed something like that to finish the task.” (194) Kathy felt “powerful tides” were tearing their helpless fate. She

knew that leaving them would drag all of them, including herself, near “death”; in other words, she was in the state of mind of forcing a double suicide. It had to be *her* to end their relationship. That is probably why she felt “triumphed” and called it the “task.” Liani Lochner states “[T]he Hailsham clones have no desire to escape.”(233) because clones perceive giving organs to humans as “their *duty*, the clones constantly affirm as natural an ideology of which they are the victims.”(233) Nobody obviously show their anger thus far as Lochner states. However, there is a scene where Tommy evokes his anger.

The three of them had reunited since Kathy’s departure at the Cottages, but soon Ruth “completes” after her second donation. Kathy and Tommy finally become lovers, as Kathy being a carer and Tommy being a donor. They decide to meet Madame and ask for “deferral” which is to ask for a reprieve from the donations. However, they learn that the “deferral” is just a rumour. On the way home in the car, Tommy asks Kathy to pull over. He gets out, walks towards darkness, and screams furiously. Kathy follows him and recalls the scene as follows:

I was in a field that sloped down steeply not far in front of me, and I could see the lights of some village way below in the valley. The wind here was really powerful, and a gust pulled at me so hard, I had to reach for the fence post. The moon wasn’t quite full, but it was bright enough, and I could make out in the mid-distance, near where the field began to fall away, Tommy’s figure, raging, shouting, flinging his fists and kicking out. (268-78)

Here, Kathy uses the wind as a metaphor to describe their helpless fate. In the earlier scene, she used tides. On the contrary, she sees the lights in the valley, which show the stableness of human lives. This contrast of views emphasises the transient and hopeless nature of Kathy and Tommy’s future.

Tommy receives his fourth donation notification. It is literary his “death sentence.” He requests Kathy to resign from being his carer and she accepts it. He states his feelings to Kathy:

I keep thinking about this river somewhere, with the water moving really fast. And these two people in the water, trying to hold onto each

other, holding on as hard as they can, but in the end it's just too much. The current's too strong. They've got to let go, drift apart. That's how I think it is with us. It's a shame, Kath, we can't stay together forever.
(277)

While listening to his story, Kathy remembers the scene where she held Tommy in her arms in the darkness. The two people in the river, who Tommy refers to, are probably Kathy and Tommy. This time Tommy uses the current to describe their fate as a metaphor. This is the last affectionate confession of his life towards Kathy. Soon after finishing the fourth donation, Tommy dies. As Lochner puts it, "[I]t can be suggested, Kathy becomes an organ donor not only because she considers it her fate but also because this was the outcome for Ruth and Tommy, the people closest to her. The power of her identity as a Hailsham student is such that she cannot envision a different future." (233)

At the end of the novel, Kathy walks up to an open field and gazes at two lines of barbed wire and all sorts of rubbish flapping in the wind in Norfolk. The wind is blowing across empty fields and trying to sweep away the rubbish. Kathy describes the rubbish "strange" (282), which is an odd epithet. She is attaching significance to it. Sebastian Groes sees this as, "the plastic are their empty skins, carrier bags from which the organs have been removed." (223) In other words, they could be the metaphor of clones' corpses caught and tangled on the wires and tree branches as if it were their graveyard or evidence of being crucified. It could not do anything but wait to be blown away. At the very end Kathy says, "if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I'd see it Tommy," (282) and "I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be." (282) She neither cries nor shouts aloud but quietly "waits." Her silence makes the reader think - What was she waiting for? Why did she use the verb "wait" twice? Maybe she was waiting for the rubbish to escape, but it never happened. Maybe she was waiting to watch it vanish in the air as she accepted her death.

3. Conclusion

As for comparing the scenes of separation between *The Remains of*

the Day and *Never Let Me Go* where protagonists evoke their emotions, a clear difference stands out. In *The Remains of the Day* Stevens recognizes his loss and decides to move on to live a better life. On the other hand, in *Never Let Me Go* clones never get to choose anything.

When Stevens was serving Lord Darlington as a butler, he never thought of making decisions, including those related to his private life. His employer gave him orders, and he was just obeying them. However, after Lord Darlington passed away and a new American owner replaced him, Stevens started to have doubts about his life. Meeting with Miss Kenton, however, was something he had believed would make his life more abundant, but it was too late. Stevens had no choice other than to accept the fact. He finally made a choice of his own at the end.

In *Never Let Me Go*, clones never have a chance to choose what they want to do with their life. Of course, they get to choose trivial things like where to live and when to become a carer, but those are within the system. They never get to choose something that will influence life. They only accept what is given to them. They need to give or donate their organs whenever humans require.

In conclusion, as seen from the above, the significant difference is that the boundary between humans and clones is “choice making.” The only mercy clones sought for was the “deferral” and not the “termination.” Kathy’s silent anger is her way of displaying resistance to fate and to the humans (readers). *Never Let Me Go* implies depriving rights to choose is the most inhumane behaviour.

Work Cited

Ando, Satoshi, “Kazuo Ishiguro No Eikoku [Kazuo Ishiguro’s England”, *Musashino No Eibungaku*, Musashino Joshi Daigaku Eibungakkai 27 (1994): 47-59.

Groes, Sebastian and Sean Matthews, eds. *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. London: Continuum, 2009.

Groes, Sebastian and Barry Lewis, eds. *Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of the Novels*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

- Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Remains of the Day*. Faber and Faber, 1995.
- . *When We Were Orphans*. New York: First Vintage International, 2000.
- . *Never Let Me Go*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005.
- Lewis, Barry. *Kazuo Ishiguro*. Manchester UP, 2000.
- Phelan, James and Martin P. Mary. 'The Lessons of "Weymouth": Homodiegesis, Unreliability, Ethics, and *The Remains of the Day*,' pp. 88-109, March 2018. www.academia.edu/1053965/.
- Robbins, Bruce, "Cruelty Is Bad: Banality and Proximity in *Never Let Me Go*", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 40.3 (2007): 289-302.
- Shaffer, Brian W. and Cynthia F. Wong, eds. *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*. Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 2008.
- Shaffer, Brian W., *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro*. U of South Carolina Press, 1998.
- Tatsuta, Atsuko, "Kazuo Ishiguro", *Subaru* 33.5 (2011): 250-253.

¹ Children at Hailsham believed when the couple proved that they are deeply in love, they could spend some time together without worrying about the "donation" for some years.