

Never let me go: a marxist attack on science?



Ishiguro's 'Never Let Me Go' is an inherently Marxist novel, from its subject matter to its characters, and proposes its message through allusions to reification and the possible threat posed by science and its discoveries. Although some elements may not be as covert as others throughout the narrative, it remains an entirely Marxist attack on the inventions of the intelligensia and the effect this then has on the proletariat.

The most obvious way in which 'Never Let Me Go' has an underlying Marxist meaning is through the idea that the reason the Hailsham students are clones is to provide organs for the rich when they are in need. The fact that this luxury is only available to those highest in society is reminiscent of how the intelligensia exploit the proletariat by enforcing manual labour while the rich take credit for the work of the poor. When the rich need transplants, they can rely on the Hailsham children, and other clones like them, to provide this service willingly with no argument. Had the discovery of cloning for the sake of transplants never occurred, the rich would not have this monopoly over the 'proletariat' and the inequalities of opportunity we see here would not have arisen. The rich would stay rich and there would not be clones living short lives because their only purpose is to provide a new set of organs for whoever requires this. The part of this that makes it even more alike to Marxist ideologies is that the children, while they are technically aware of their futures, have been conditioned to believe that it is a normal fate to be resigned to, just as the proletariat believe that their lives of manual labour, cheap wages and never being appreciated for the work they do is a normal thing to experience. Madame tells Kathy and Tommy later in the novel, when they go to visit her to ask for an exception, "Poor creatures.

What did we do to you? With all our schemes and plans?" which emphasizes the social differences between her and them. Referring to the couple as 'creatures' reduces them to animals, just as the bourgeoisie would have though the proletariat were undeserving of human treatment. The term draws attention to the fact that they aren't even real humans - they are copies of a human, made for a specific purpose. More importantly, Madame saying " what did we do to you?" reminds the reader that there is a difference between them - though they all may look like normal people, Kathy and Tommy are destined to die before they turn 35 simply because their organs are going to be given away, while Madame will live out her life in peace. This is entirely representative of how the rich would look down on the working class, with the knowledge that they are being exploited for the gain of the bourgeoisie; Madame and the teachers at Hailsham always knew of the children's fates but also could do nothing to stop them fulfilling that fate. Without science and its discoveries, the rich wouldn't be placed in this position of power over the clones because there would be no clones to exploit and in this way, ' Never Let Me Go' is attacking the very base of science by criticizing the possibilities it provides us with. The idea of cloning that we see throughout the novel echoes scientific discoveries made around the time it was written, such as the argued ' success' of Dolly the Sheep, a cloned animal who died in 2003 - what Ishiguro does in his book is take the idea of cloning to an extreme that draws attention to the exploitation of human beings, and how the pain Dolly went through is just the start of the potential pain humans could go through at the hands of science and the rich.

In Georg Lukacs' book, ' Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', he takes apart the ways in which the bourgeoisie make the proletariat so willing to be exploited, specifically through reification, which is where the person being exploited is so used to the idea of it that it becomes a norm rather than something immoral. The children at Hailsham have, therefore, been reified to believe that the society they live in is natural while the reader can see the horror of how they live. They become objects rather than people, used to complete a purpose and a service used only by the rich, and Miss Lucy attempts to draw their attention to this by telling them " You have been told and not told," meaning that they are all aware of their futures and the tasks that will come with that, but do not fully understand what this will mean. Miss Lucy feels guilty about their exploitation and tries to explain that although they might be ' okay' with the way they are going to be treated, they will not be okay with never living normal lives. This also highlights a gap in their reification - they aren't fully comfortable with the situation they are faced with and this becomes clearer throughout the novel as Ruth expresses an interest in wanting to be an office worker and to live an entirely normal life where she goes to work every day; if the reification had been successful, she would be happy to live her simple life of student, carer, donor. Kathy, Tommy and Ruth hold the knowledge of their futures vaguely; it's there and they know it is an inevitability, but they also never feel entirely comfortable with it, shown by Ruth's reaction to not finding her Parent Clone. She tells Kathy " We're modelled from trash... We all know it, so why don't we say it?" and lashes out at her, which is the first time she openly discusses the cloning and the eventual donating. The fact that she is so angry about it implies that her reification is incomplete because she still desires finding her original

clone in the hope that she could live a normal life instead of dying middle aged. The life they led at Hailsham is described as “ a cosy state of suspension in which we could ponder our lives without the usual boundaries,” which tells the reader that there is a sense while they are there of slight concern for the future, since the home of their childhood is a safe space where they can imagine an unrealistic future. Other than this, they are entirely unconcerned about their future and it is because of the scientific discovery of clones and cloning people for this purpose that they live this life. The title itself, ‘ Never Let Me Go’ is an example of subtle dramatic irony; the pronoun ‘ me’ is almost mocking all the characters we meet, as there is no such thing as ‘ me’ for Kathy, Tommy and Ruth; their identities are irrelevant because they are bred for a purpose and their physical appearances are that of another human instead of something independent to themselves. Thus, reducing characters to something that isn’t even an identity attacks the fact that science has led them to this place where they live then die without ever experiencing a unique life as everything they are is copied or for the gain of the rich.

Finally, is the concept of the Exchanges and the Gallery, which is fundamentally Marxist. The children at Hailsham are encouraged to create art and their lessons focus on creation instead of anything of actual education because there is no need for them to be educated as they will never actually find any use for Maths or English, and special pieces are then selected for the ‘ gallery’ by Madame. The children also give and receive art from their friends and other students. The idea of giving away something of value as a form of currency is inherently Capitalist; the art is a form of worth

and a product of their ' manual labour', in a way, and in giving it away they are doing just what the Proletariat do - using their talent for the gain of the rich. Throughout the novel the children are told they are unique and special, and grow up believing that they are cared about and cherished for their worth when in reality, they are the exact opposite. They are clones of " trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps,". The only real worth they have is the service they provide for the rich. Miss Lucy tells the students, " You're... special. That's what each of you were created to do," which simultaneously supports what the children are made to feel at the school - that each of them and the art they create is special and individual and full of potential - while also reminding them that they are entirely owned by another and will never live anything resembling as special life. The fact that they are clearly accustomed to the " lives that have been set out" for them is a covert attack on the science behind their existence. The fact that, because of the bourgeoisie and the people paying for clones to be made, raised and then forced to donate their organs, reminds the reader that although the horrors of the novel are slowly revealed to us in a way that means we are not shocked at Miss Lucy's harsh revelation of their futures, this is exactly how it is revealed to them. They are not shocked as they grow up because they have been conditioned to believe this is the norm because of scientific discoveries that push them to the bottom of society before they are even born. Ishiguro manages to normalize this idea of cloning but the reader is still shocked at the way the characters embrace their fates, yet in our society, IVF is a normalised treatment that no one contends. IVF is also something that echoes Marxist critiques, because it is something only the rich can afford - at nearly £3000 for one round of treatment, it could be

argued that even something as natural as having a child is a luxury that certain people do not deserve, and in a way, Ishiguro is drawing out attention to how cloning for the sake of organs is something that might not be drastically far away from modern day society.

While Ishiguro's ' Never Let Me Go' is overtly Marxist in its very approach, it is also a covert fight against how scientific discoveries are not always beneficial to the masses and instead often serves as a cruel mechanism by which the people on the lower rungs of society can be exploited. Without the discovery of cloning for the sake of organs, the horrors Kathy, Tommy and Ruth face throughout the novel would have been an unimaginably cruel fate and thus Ishiguro goes some way towards attacking this ideology.