



WHAT IF LOVE CAN SAVE US... A STUDY OF ROMANTIC LOVE IN THE DYSTOPIAN FICTION NEVER LET ME GO, BY KAZUO ISHIGURO



E SE O AMOR PUDER NOS SALVAR... UM ESTUDO SOBRE O AMOR ROMÂNTICO NA FICÇÃO DISTÓPICA NEVER LET ME GO DE KAZUO ISHUGURO

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Resumo

Este estudo é uma pesquisa bibliográfica que analisa o conceito de amor romântico entre clones em uma sociedade distópica retratada em "Never let me go" (2005) de Kazuo Ishiguro. A discussão sobre a sociedade e a posição dos clones foram baseadas na teoria da utopia (Trousson, 1990), da distopia (Vieira, 2010) e da heterotopia (Foucault, 2009). Os clones são considerados um grupo de entidades que são vistas como menos humanas ou mesmo não humanas criadas para serem consumidas como repositórios de órgãos e descartadas pelos humanos reais. Este trabalho debate como a construção do amor

romântico (Johnson, 1987) é desenvolvida nesta ficção, principalmente entre os clones. A narrativa expõe como os *corpos* são despersonalizados, controlados e subordinados pelas estratégias de coerção naquele espaço distópico. O amor romântico torna-se o meio por meio do qual os personagens clones pensam a sua própria sobrevivência e uma tentativa inconformista de enfrentar aquela sociedade, ou seja, o amor romântico significa uma reação e resistência contra aquele sistema social.



Abstract

This article was developed through a bibliographic study based on the concept of romantic love among clones in the dystopian society portrayed in “Never Let Me Go” (2005) by Kazuo Ishiguro. The discussion on society and clones’ position is based on the theories of utopia (Trousson, 1990), dystopia (Vieira, 2010), and heterotopia (Foucault, 2009). The clones were regarded as a group of entities who were seen as less human or even non-human entities created to be consumed as organ repositories and discarded by the so-called real humans. The work debates how the construction of romantic love (Johnson, 1987) is depicted in this fiction, especially among the clones. The narrative exposes how the bodies are depersonalized, controlled, and subordinated by coercive strategies in that dystopian space. Romantic love arises as a way of surviving and as an attempt of nonconformity to face that society, that is, romantic love means a reaction and resistance against that social system.

Entradas para indexação

Palavras-chave: Distopia. Heterotopia. Corpo. Amor romântico.

Keywords: Dystopia. Heterotopia. Body. Romantic Love.

Texto integral

Introduction

What if we lived in a world where people who needed organ transplants did not need to wait for years and worry about getting life-saving surgery to survive? And if we have a name bank with many possible donors, we can confer supplementary organs whenever necessary? Nevertheless, if science could do it without any concerns about ethical questions because these donors are clones, would be considered non-human despite the fact of having enough human organic features created specifically for this function?

This scenery is portrayed by Kazuo Ishiguro in “Never Let Me Go” (2005) in which Kathy H., the protagonist, narrates how this world would have been if cloning humans were possible in the past. Kathy is a female clone who, through her diary, tells her life’s trajectory, about what happened in the past, set in the 1980s and 1990s, in England. She reports how it is to be a clone, how her destiny was traced before she was even born, and how she developed her friendship with Ruth C and love relations with Tommy D., who is also a clone.

“Never Let Me Go” is a British fiction that contains science fiction and or speculative traces but here we opted to regard the narrative as the utopia/dystopia subgenre. Since romantic love is represented in bodies considered

inherently human, the main objective of this study is to analyse how the clones, considered non-human bodies, can represent romantic love in that dystopian society. To this, the novel was considered a postmodern rereading of the tragedy of Tristan and Isolde by considering some relevant traces such as passion, turnarounds, jobberies, and the impossibility of achieving love in the end through a long-term relationship.

Johnson (1987) states the phenomena of romantic love can be traced back to Tristan and Isolde's tragedy in Western culture; since then, it has influenced literature and other artistic productions.

This article is the result of a bibliographical study, structured into three sections, in the first the notions of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia were discussed to explain the setting, and place of a fictional society where the feeling, especially love can have reflections and projections with different meanings when it comes to relationships established by humans or by clones. The second focuses on the discussion of the non-human, non-place, and non-time notions to understand the clones as an invisible category of people who are considered to be less human and therefore defined simply as organ repositories for real humans. The third centres on the love between the so-called non-humans, the clones, and how it is developed, viewed, and rejected in the dystopian society.

The social relevance of the study is centred on the reflection on how people understand, define and reproduce romantic love over time and on media as a human feeling. However, by categorizing it according to the influences of technology and the consumer market, romantic love has become either something easily achieved or hard to grasp in every love story.

Inside the cave

This section resorts to the metaphor of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, to deepen the understanding of how society is divided between humans and clones. Clones are created, nourished and educated to serve human society. Inside the school, they study, play, eat, talk, live and grow up, unaware of their final fate as organ donors. Clones live entrapped inside a school that represents Plato's cave, where humans are chained and can just glimpse the projected reality made of shadows.

Ironically, in the dystopian society, ordinary human beings live in the outside world, not knowing about the clones or caring about the origin of the available organs, being also fooled by the system. The clones are apparently kept in a place surrounded by the walls of Hailsham, the school.

The rigorous rules, the class schedule, the medical evaluations, and the care for their healthy bodies are part of their routine because they are born with the purpose of serving human society. Hailsham represents their world. Through Kathy's eyes, the narrative conveys how people learn to be what they ought to be, the future organ donors for human society. In this world, Hailsham is a different school from others, thus another type of school or even a nonschool, for not serving the purpose of educating students to develop free minds.

In this boarding school, Kathy H., Tommy D., Ruth C., and other children are born without family ties, thus, without a surname. This is one of the

depersonalization strategies through which clones develop their consciousness of their inhuman condition by subordinating their bodies to the system completely, thus becoming distinguished from the so-called real humans. Their education in Hailsham, based on psychological and physical coercion and control of their actions, makes them accept their future as organ donors. It becomes clear that the human beings' dream of prolonging life expectancy means exactly the imprisonment of others, the clones.

In order to discuss dystopia, it is necessary to resort to utopia, a term coined by Thomas Morus, and published in 1516. His famous work entitled "Utopia" depicts a fictional island where its inhabitants led a harmonic life. This perfect place is also a non-place, as it is fictional and exists only on the pages of utopia. Utopia also denotes a kind of literature that according to Vieira (2010, p.6) depicts "the desire for a better life, caused by a feeling of discontentment towards the society one lives in (utopia is then seen as a matter of attitude)".

According to Trousson (1990), utopia is a literary genre centred on a narrative that departs from real-life problematics to construct or imagine another world with better structures and a possible solution to common social problems. The author highlights that this parallel world encompasses scientific, architectural, philosophical, political, pedagogical, and other perspectives that help readers understand it as an alternative society in fiction by following the space and the chronology in the work. Unlike the classical utopia set in the future, the selected narrative has science fiction traces, as "Never Let Me Go" (2005) is set in England in the mid-1990s. Thus, it is a retrodystopia, as the story is set in the past to reflect how the world would have been if the cloning process had been possible.

To Vieira (2010), utopian literature allows us to reflect upon an imaginary society or a good place where some particular social disturbance appears with a possible solution. Thus, utopian literature conveys *hope* to find a solution to real-world problems. In "Never Let Me Go", hope is also seen as the clones are born and become adult organ donors, probably as an answer to the contemporary medical matter of the need for organ transplants by ordinary people.

Utopia shows another side of the story with contradictions and dissatisfaction in a distorted path because it does not include all entities to reach happiness. The fact that the utopian project might not work leads the author to produce another type of fiction, the dystopia (Vieira, 2010). In the book, organ donors would have to sacrifice their lives for society's great good. In this sense, Vieira (2010) points out that science and technology are frequently used in dystopian literature as a discourse to justify social advances. Still, the negative consequences leave us to confirm humans' incapacity to get a better world for all in essence.

For Claeys (2010), the classical dystopia centres on socio-political critiques, and oppressive systems that control the individuals. In "1984", by George Orwell, Winston Smith lives in an oppressive society, watched and controlled by a telescreen. His work is to continuously change the historical accounts to fulfil the political interests of the present.

Contemporary dystopia, on the contrary, involves critiques of capitalism centred on the corporal element. The body becomes the last frontier of the capitalist market to conquer. In Ishiguro's novel, the body is presented as a thing to

be used and discarded according to its validity in the economic system (Marques, 2013; 2014). For Fitting (2010), social critique expresses the encouragement for change, and utopianism, when assumed as a dystopia, means a way to defend the maintenance of the *status quo*.

“Never Let Me Go” (2005) conveys a dystopia, thereby reflecting the suffering of a group of individuals considered non-humans, created to sustain the real human class. It is a tense reading that might sound both a social critique of current society, thus with the will to change, and a utopianism, a fatalistic reading of maintenance of the *status quo*.

The clones’ bodies do not belong to them but to the institution/corporation/ state, which is why Kathy speaks from a place of silence. Her silent voice echoes from her written testimony, conveying the message of an erased body, from a past that no longer exists, thus nowhere, towards a dead future.

Also, her writings from her body raised within the walls of an institution establish a dialogue with heterotopia, a conception drawn by Foucault (2013). Contrary to a utopia, which is a non-place and a perfect place, a heterotopia is a real place, a topology with a function, which is not always clear to us. Heterotopia, according to Foucault, is called another place. It can present features of two or more places in one, being a juxtaposition of places that can convey a mix of chronology, images, and rituals found in museums, cemeteries, and others that must bring a feeling of isolation or a distancing from the outworld such as observed in boarding schools, hospitals, and prisons. The presence of somebody in a heterotopia requires an adaptation or knowledge of it and mainly respect for its own rules.

Hailsham has denied its existence in the real world as an ordinary school because it was created with the objective of keeping children’s clones far from the public eye. The clones are cast from ordinary social life until adulthood when they are allowed to go out to accomplish their objectives. Thus, Hailsham represents a heterotopia for being a place cast from society and overlapping functions of orphanage, hospital, and prison. It functions as an institution through which repression, domination, and alienation are instilled in the clones, being central to their socialization as organ donors.

Thereby, Hailsham simulates being a school allowing the students to perform their daily lives as if they were considered almost humans. Thus, it is considered a heterotopia because it also presents itself as an antithetical space where similarities between clones and humans are attested and contested, given the opposition between clones and humans.

Hailsham is the location where students/clones are presented and nurtured, it is the visible physical place, but also it is the place where no one can be seen and thus exist in reality. Thus, it is the location where the clones cannot live fully active in a society, which is invisible and unachievable for them, ironically it also reflects the outside world by simulating the society’s daily rituals such as art class.

Outside of the cave



Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" can also help explain the process through which the clones become aware of their condition as organ donors and resist their own fate. When Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy grow up, they finally leave Hailsham to meet and live with other clones in Cottages¹ before starting the organ donation or becoming a temporary carer², a caretaker. But, out of Hailsham, the behaviour of Kathy's friends remains the same, they do not question their positions or even rebel against their fate, they simply follow their central purpose in life. The conditioning time in Hailsham is enough to make them comfortable with their lives. Even when they are out of the cave, their bodies remain as shadows in society. According to Marques (2014), the dystopian novels from the 1960s are centred on the body and its relation to social, political, cultural and economic aspects of society heavily controlled by market relations. Such centrality is observed in Ishiguro's dystopia.

According to Foucault (2013), utopias are originated from the discussions around the bodies and can be turned against them. In this way, in the novel, the human utopia of keeping a body healthy by replacing the ill organs leads to the creation of Hailsham and an educational system that controls the clones. The control is performed both physically behind the walls and emotionally, keeping the clones entrapped within their own bodies.

Marques (2014) states that contemporary dystopia depicts the sterile body conveying its inability or evident defect. Society's non-acceptance of an unfit body in the narrative is conveyed in the discourse about the need to enhance the body's functioning through science. Such a view can explain the discourse about the fear of having/assuming an unable and the desire for an able body. Human beings avoid becoming considered as unable bodies and pay the price of sacrificing their clones, considered to be non-human bodies. The power relationship is established as human beings are seen as superior in relation to clones, needing their help and assistance to keep their status as able bodies. As the clones are harvested, their bodies become increasingly unable, to be dependent on a carer. In this sense, this perverse mechanism of consuming fresh and healthy organs harvested from clones aids the maintenance of the relationship between human beings and clones, able bodies and unable bodies in the novel.

Also, infertility is a clear trace that differentiates the human body from the so-called non-human body in dystopia. Sterility justifies discarding young and healthy bodies in a capitalist society since reproduction becomes an elementary human practice, allied with the concept of building a family and growing old. The social and natural life cycle of birth, maturity and death are denied to clones, as, after school years, they do not become fully functioning citizens or humans with rights. Still, their bodies become a source for organ harvesting, being denied rights and even humanity. Conversely, Parrinder (2010) points out castration as a price of happiness in utopian literature. Clones' living is associated with the absence of romantic and sexual involvement. Their castration and sacrifice, in this sense, signifies the price of happiness in human society.

To Foucault (2013), the mirror in a heterotopia presents itself as an inaccessible virtual space where another place or world exists. Besides that, it

¹ The Cottages were a Hailsham version for old students where they have to wait for their invitation to start the donations.

² The carers are clones who take care of another clone who is in the process of organ donation.

reflects the entities and constitutes their bodies and their boundaries, thickness, and weight. A mirror is a physical object placed in the real space of a heterotopia, while the reflection creates an unattainable local, the utopia of bodies. In the mirror, the body is always in another place. Similarly, the clones exist and live as the reflection of human beings in the “mirrors” constructed by society as it conceals and reveals the clones as organ donors. The biological clone bodies are created without the pretension of being original, they can be seen as “sterile” bodies as they must grow and live without leaving descendants.

In this way, Ishiguro’s dystopian fiction conveys the relationship of two or more dimensions that constantly clash provoking tension in the narrative. As the clones leave Hailsham, they start nourishing the original humans’ desire for a healthy body, sharing the same outside space of society. Nevertheless, the clones must stay away from being so close to the real humans, otherwise, they would approach the “mirror” to see their original humans in order to free themselves.

When Ruth receives the news that other clones have seen her “possible”, the human being from which she was cloned, she convinces her friends to help her find her. But, when she finally sees the “possible”, she discovers it is not exactly how she has imagined it. Also, she supposes it was the wrong “possible”. But the “possible” might seem different because it is real, and real human beings are not perfect.

According to Marques (2013), the original human body can present features that we can call inhuman, being, thus, a living contradiction. Foucault (2013) says it is from the body which derives the real and the utopic. Therefore, the clone friends understand that humans are not better or worse than them, but they are simply equally imperfect beings as the clones, with different representations and positions in society.

At this moment, Ruth perceives her absence in society, since she has been somewhere else in the Hailsham, she understands she can exist in one version of herself, in the real dimension. Nevertheless, as Ruth is the virtual image of the “possible”, she cannot face the real image, she visualizes her “possible” from afar because she herself is considered as the virtual counterpart dependent on the real image to exist. Making an analogy with the mirror, the human beings as considered real thing requires the clones to remain virtual to continue to live in the real world. This fact is enough for Ruth to accept her destiny as an organ donor, she ultimately sacrifices herself so that her “possible” remains alive. Foucault (2009) calls it the retroactive effect, which is a derivative of mixed experience provoked by the mirror.

To Foucault (2009), heterotopias bind the occupation of spaces and our representation in social positions within society. It does not limit the occupation of geographical spaces but focuses on the relation between social positions that must be visible, irreducible and cannot be overlapped. Clones and humans occupy distinct spaces in the narrative that cannot be changed or overlapped.

The heterotopia of illusion is portrayed in “Never Let Me Go” (2005) by using objects similar to the real world to simulate their performance and get accustomed to the existence of another world. For Foucault (2009), each heterotopia has a functioning within society and the heterotopia of illusion presents its characters as simply passing guests who would never be part of

reality. The narrative's protagonists will never be invited to participate in real society's events and rites, and their attempt to participate in real society generates their immediate exclusion.

And finally, the rejection of the traditional time to adopt a time distinct from reality is defined as heterochrony. According to Foucault (2009), in heterotopias, time is perceived as distinct from real-time, that is, it supposes a non-time, symmetrical and in agreement with a heterotopic view. The location of time in Kathy's narrative suggests the 1980s and 1990s. However, it does not have the commitment to the chronological time. Kathy has chosen to narrate her story in the past time, focusing on her experiences because the non-time can be any time. By concealing ideas of a pessimistic future, she opens up space for hope for the future and resists her fate.

Love, memories and humanity

After the death of Kathy's friends, provoked by successive donations, Kathy, who is still a carer and has not started her donations, decides to write her memories as she remembers the events from the past. Fitting (2010) states that in a dystopia, the use of language is seen as a resistance strategy facing alienating contexts of coercion and consent. To Baccolin and Moylan (2003), diaries, memories, and epistolary novels that narrate the protagonist's life portray a self-reflexive way of conveying an emancipatory discourse that questions the political and social future of humankind.

Varsam (2003) points out that it is common to identify the slavery voice in autobiographical texts presented in dystopian fiction. When the narrator is a female voice, the main themes are the question of freedom, relationship, and sexuality, and the concerns about body control. In a world where the domain of science is in charge of establishing and maintaining order, clones were not created to practice forced labour, but they are considered slaves because they are denied the freedom of choosing their own fate, enjoying life or even getting involved in romantic relationships. They are simply products that result from scientific investment.

Kathy's discourse contests her position and the role assigned to her and her supposed lack of humanity. Before Tommy starts his process of harvesting organs, Kathy gets involved with him. They have been in love since childhood. However, Ruth disturbed them in the past, splitting them. Being supported by Ruth, the couple searches for guardians who worked in Hailsham to ask about postponing their donation process for some time so that they can live their romantic relationship. In order to live their romantic relationship, they must prove their humanity.

Initially, Tommy was very excited, because the education in Hailsham was centred on humanities and arts. From time to time, their guardians used to take some artwork samples to display at the madam's gallery. Thus, Tommy believes that their artwork and other productions can prove they are special, proving their capacity to love each other. When Kathy and Tommy finally meet Madame and Mrs. Emily, the ladies clarify to them the utility of the Gallery:

Why did we do that? You said an interesting thing earlier, Tommy. When you were discussing this with Marie-Claude. 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, 2005, p. 264)

In the narrative, it becomes clear that the clones are seen as empty being, whose humanity need to be attested through the capacity of expressing themselves through arts. Those productions are not capable of proving their capacity to love or even get involved in a romantic relationship. For the guardians, it was important to demonstrate the results of the scientific investment to the sponsors and nothing else.

Hailsham has been a model of experiment based on ethical principles that according to the ladies promoted education and instructions to the clones: "Most importantly, we demonstrated to the world that if students were reared in humane, cultivated environments, it was possible for them to grow to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 265).

Even with all the efforts to be raised as real humans, the clones Kathy and Tommy cannot live together or enjoy their romance. The guardians' endeavours to treat clones ethically do not implicate the recognition of their humanity. The artworks do not prove that the clones have souls, they simply prove that clones can become as sensitive as human beings becoming suitable donors. This scene portrays the tyrannical nature inserted into the dystopia, the human insensibility to recognize the clones' feelings for each other as romantic love.

Karandashev (2017) points out that romantic love is a social construction and depends on four spheres: ideas, institutions, social interaction, and individuals. Thus, for romantic love to be recognized it is necessary to be accepted in these four spheres. The guardians controlled and permeated these spheres, living in other spaces far from the clones' social and cultural space, which made them unable to see the clones as beings capable of loving.

Also, according to Karandashev (2017, p. 12), "People have difficulty to see the life from another culture's view, especially when they know little about that culture. People tend to attribute their view to the people of another culture", In this dystopia, it is possible to understand romantic love as undervalued when it comes to a clone couple. Clones and humans seem to belong to distinct cultures and categories of people. Guardians place science in the first place, not accepting that clones would fall in love or even feel human feelings. The ladies do not fear seeing the clones as the same as humans, but the consequences of recognizing their humanity would be their damnation as the worst vicious murderers.

After the ladies deny giving more time to Kathy and Tommy to enjoy their love relationship, it becomes evident that the clones are living in true romantic love. Despite all the disappointments and conflicts in their lives Kathy and Tommy could not live together ever after. In the end, Kathy understands she has more human qualities than the guardians and the people who consider themselves real humans, Kathy understands the close relationship between love and death, and her self-sacrifice for love has made her a noble soul.

In sum, this society replaces romantic love in favour of scientific advances. The clones' feelings represent their resistance to the system. We can even question all the processes the clones are submitted, to become the perfect human organ harvesting site. Victims of the system, which categorized the ones who could live and the ones who would die, Kathy and Tommy resist their own fate by loving each other.

Final Words

"Never Let Me Go" (2005) presents a society in which the creation of clones is possible as a solution to the health issue of organ transplantation. However, the supposed solution becomes an ethical matter when Kathy H., the protagonist, narrates the clones' suffering (Ishiguro, 2005). This dystopian fiction set in the past revealed how science, when allied to the system can categorize people according to their bodies, labelling them as inhumane and denying the capacity to love and be loved.

The notion of heterotopia, drawn by Foucault (2009) allows understanding Hailsham's structure crucial to the maintenance of the dystopic society centred on the control of clones' bodies. This dystopian society described in the fiction defines who can be considered human and non-human at birth categorizing individuals according to their bodies (Marques, 2013; 2014).

The projections of love portrayed by Kathy and Tommy are not recognized as legitimate, and their attempts to prove their feelings through art production fail to work. But guardians, considered humans, are unable to understand the clones' true love feelings that transcend humanity. The clones' attempt to prolong their lives evidences their resistance to a dictatorial system that has suppressed them from assuming behaviours and feelings considered human as romantic involvement and love, respectively. By doing so, the clones are denied their humanity, and love loses its value and space in society. Nevertheless, Kathy and Tommy resist the dictatorial system through love.

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