

## ENGLISH – STASILAND & NEVER LET ME GO TEXT COMPARISON

**Topic: Conformity and survival are intimately linked. Compare how this notion is explored in both texts.**

Conforming to societal expectations and control only guarantees basic survival but to the expense of freedom. In both texts, Stasiland by Anna Funder and Never let me go by Kazuo Ishiguro, conformity within a society creates complacency and thus leads to its downfall. Those who are hopeful and rebel against oppressive control, are the ones who can ultimately survive. Alignment with society's expectations and conforming to control creates a loss of one's sovereignty and thus, humanity.

From the outset of both texts, conformity appears to be the safest compelling option to survive in the face of authoritative control. At the beginning of Stasiland, Miriam's attempt to escape from the Berlin Wall ultimately was met with her torture and persecution. Her torture was a symbol of the oppressive authoritative control which is omnipresent throughout both texts. Miriam's "itch... at the age of sixteen..." to rebel against this control is extinguished, as Funder portrays the persecution of rebellion during that time period. Contrasting with this the Clones were never truly given any opportunity to rebel. Being "told and not told" the role of the Clones was slowly revealed to the readers and the clones themselves, Ishiguro's use of filtering of selective information mimics the manipulation of information Hailsham, and ultimately society has over the clones. This is further reinforced as the clones themselves exhibit control on one another "like an unspoken rule", they kept each other in check. They never question their role and the reasons against it as it was not presented to them thus they remained compliant. Julia can be likened to the Clones as she wasn't explicitly against the GDR regime, as "if you didn't buck the system... you'd be fine..." this mentality of conformity as a guarantee of survival is what led the characters to simply conform. However through this lack of rebellion, the power is shifted in the favour of authorities as a self-sustaining society with these teachings further removing any chance to rebel. Conformity being encouraged by authorities' greater power imbalance, within society has a tendency to simply conform do not necessarily achieving survival.

Despite the inclination to conform, characters who embrace hope and rebellion are the ones who retain their freedom and survival. Following on from part 1 of Never Let Me Go, Ishiguro's usage of sequential segments in his text highlights the shifting of the clone's mindsets. During part 2, the opportunity to rebel is presented to the clones with the option to defer their "donations". Although Never Let Me Go is set up with dystopian concepts, rather than employing scientific jargon, Ishiguro's use of euphemisms mask the true meaning of death and role of the clones who will eventually meet their predestined death. With this in mind, the clones display a slight urge to rebel but ironically in a controlled manner, a controlled rebellion. The idea of deferrals supposedly originated from the Hailsham guardians themselves and thus, fundamentally would be a plot set up by society, emphasising the clones as a commodity. Similarly, in Stasiland, the stasi spies who thought they were getting an "upper hand" over another - were simply conforming to the expectations of the authorities and fulfilling their set role. They were ultimately working for the GDR and ironically spying on one another. Rather than conforming to rebel, it's when the characters rebel entirely independently do we witness freedom, for example, Kathy's Judy Bridgewater tape, a symbol of rebellion and control. The tape has a double meaning, Kathy's singing of 'Never Let Me Go' serves as a symbol of the lack of freedom the clones inhabited, and their lack to deliver life, their lives limited by society's creation. Yet also through Kathy's possession of the tape, she directly rebelled against the Hailsham rules thus the possibility to embrace rebellion despite control. This is further emphasised later in the text, with the repetitive use of the tape as a motif, the tape transitions to a symbol of memories, life and

survival. As Kathy wishes to find “Norfolk... where everything lost and found goes...” in an attempt to reclaim what it means to be human, a direct parallel can be drawn between Kathy’s tape and Hagen Koch’s plate. In that moment “...that small plate... is all [he] had the courage for,” but it would signify his cling to hope and “revenge against the stasi”. It’s this constant rebellion against the stasi in which Koch really feels alive, against the GRC, and free. Despite the size of these items, the tape and plate represent hope as both Ishiguro and Funder condone rebellion to retain freedom.

At the conclusions of the texts, alignment with societal expectations creates a loss of one’s life. Following with the segmented parts in *Never let me go*, in the final part, Kathy aligns entirely with society’s constructed role for her. Previously seeking out Ruth to confirm the nostalgia and memories in an attempt to survive through memories. “I may be remembering wrong”, Kathy’s 1st person narrative and the fallibility of the selective narrator also seen in *Stasiland* through Funder’s narration. Upon finding Ruth in the future however, she has completely aligned with the expectations because “after all, it’s what we’re meant to do right?” Ruth’s inability to question her role as a donor signifies her loss of rebellion as she accepts her predetermined role, and ultimately death, both physically and psychologically, Kathy similar is unable to rebel, she conforms through being a carer. Her continuous driving away symbolises her loss of direction, always finding herself at the donor centre in alignment with societal expectations, she too has lost her life due to her loss of freedom. In contrast to *Never Alex and Go*, Funder presents characters who conclusively move one, rejecting control and regaining freedom. Miriam bookends *Stasiland*, her constant appearances within the text emphasises Funder’s approval of her rebellion against authoritative figures. Miriam moves away physically from the Berlin Wall and also psychologically from the see,ingot endless search for Charlie, she thus deviates from societal expectations and powerfully has freedom as she progresses beyond societal control of East Germany. The old men in the park present characters unable to transgress the stasi control, living in the past, bounded by the control. The inability to progress is a result of conforming to society, and it is those who rebel who can achieve survival and freedom.

Ultimately, both authors present the threat of conformity to control and authorities, risking the loss of freedom and one’s survival. Despite the compelling urge to conform, as they appear linked, characters who rebel and deviate from society are the ones who can truly experience freedom.