

ENGLISH – STASILAND AND NEVER LET ME GO TEXT COMPARISON

Compare the ways in which the role of memory is explored in *Stasiland* and *Never Let Me Go*.

Within times of immense suffering and disorienting change, memory is both a bridge to cross the gap between past and present and a painful reminder of history, as Haruki Murakami stated, “Memories warm you up from the inside. But they also tear you apart.” Inspired by the social context of fast-moving development of biological and medical sciences in the early 21st century, Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel Never Let Me Go (NLMG), explores memory as a medium to cope with human mortality. Conversely, Anna Funder’s memoir style novel Stasiland is instead inspired by the historical context of the fall of the Berlin Wall, delineating memory as a source of grief and embarrassment. Both texts unveil memory as a method to cope with traumatic experiences, whilst also revealing its remedial effects. However, the texts differ in that whilst *Stasiland* illustrates the consolatory power of memory, NLMG unveils the strong connection between memory and mortality.

Both texts reveal memory as a mechanism to reclaim the past to make sense of the present. After the totalitarian regime of Hitler ended, East Germany strove to radically erase the past and revert to normal living. Funder discovers that the Stasi were considered a “sort of ... embarrassing” part of German history. This insight highlights East Germany’s desire to distance itself from Hitler as they didn’t want “anything to do with him” and his ideologies. Furthermore, not only is Funder uncovering the memories of the people who lived through the GDR, but also her own as she explores the events which lead her to revisit Germany. Introspection such as when she noticed sights that she “never noticed before” highlights the dreary and oppressive nature of the GDR, giving further insight as to how memories are forgotten to accommodate present changes. Additionally, the implementation of a real world setting of post GDR Germany facilitates a better understanding of the circumstances of those who have had traumatic pasts. Similarly, Ishiguro’s narration portrays a character constantly seeking to understand her past. When caring for her donor Kathy reflects that he is living vicariously through her memories of Hailsham, “as if it was his own childhood”. The donor’s requests highlight the consolatory power of memory in coping with imminent death. Additionally, the dystopian setting of NLMG which promises an early death, facilitates the temptation to look back and reminisce as clones cannot do anything but look back upon better days. Furthermore, insights such as “I might have some of it wrong” and “I don’t remember exactly”, illustrate the fluid and fragile nature of memory and insinuate the ability of memory to be moulded and shaped to a desired outcome to understand present circumstances. Thus, both novels outline the different ways in which memory is utilised to adapt to the present.

Additionally, both NLMG and Stasiland unveil the therapeutic effect of memory to heal the wounds of a traumatic past. Throughout NLMG, clones such as Kathy have nothing to define themselves with or rely upon, as a result many choose to find refuge within the confines of their own memories, coping with their losses by turning to the past. This sentiment is epitomised through Kathy who holds dear the memories of Hailsham long after its closure as well as the memories of Tommy and Ruth long after their deaths: “if I’d wait long enough ... I’d see it was Tommy.” Memory is also shown to be as fragile as it is powerful, Ishiguro leverages this fact to divulge the human need to hold onto and be held by loved ones. Furthermore, the first-person narration highlights the absence of other characters’ memories, placing direct focus on the importance of memory in healing personal trauma. In a similar vein, Funder’s exploration of living under the oppression of the GDR illustrates the power of memory. Few of those interviewed by Funder chose

to embrace their painful experiences in the GDR and seek to learn more. Miriam Webber, whose husband was murdered by the Stasi, still has vivid memories of his death: "I could still see his head injuries..." Webber's search for the truth behind her husband's death is consolatory to her painful experiences. Unlike Ishiguro however, Funder's interview style novel is also able to shed light upon the flexibility of memory through its multiple narrators and different perspectives. Funder reveals that although some chose to confront their past many chose to repress it and "swept it under the carpet". Street names were changed, and the word Fuhrer was not only exercised "from their history but also from their language" in an attempt to forge a new Germany. Ultimately, both *NLMG* and *Stasiland* explore the consolatory properties of memory through the characterisation of characters with traumatic pasts.

The texts differ in that whilst *Stasiland* highlights memory as a source of pain, *NLMG* explores the relationship between memory and mortality. Throughout *Stasiland* Funder attempts to illustrate how an entire country of people go on living after surviving almost unspeakably painful events. Funder insinuates that these memories are a source of pain and anguish as many, in particular former officials of the East German government or members of the Stasi, attempt to repress these memories as they were "so severe that other things just fell away." Furthermore, Funder unveils that the refusal of former Stasi to acknowledge what they had done to the people of Germany was not out of guilt but anguish as it would be easier to simply ignore painful memories, "look ... it's sort of ... embarrassing." Furthermore, the non-fiction genre of the novel places emphasis on the reality of many of these situations, challenging readers to consider the real-world implications and possibilities of coping with the burdens of painful memories. On the other hand, Ishiguro in *NLMG* emphasises the strong connection between mortality and memory. Ishiguro's characterisation of clones as parentless and without history places heavy emphasis on the memories which they make as a method to define themselves and feel whole. Once death is imminent, they are portrayed to cling onto these precious memories as they "often find [themselves] remembering these things." Contrary to Funder, Ishiguro's novel is fictional and takes place after World War two as he speculates the possibilities of clone organ harvesting. This fictional setting, of an alternate version of the past, allows emphasis to be placed on humanity and relationships when humans are subjected to imminent death rather than cloning itself. Thus, Ishiguro is able to highlight the strong connection between memory and mortality whilst Funder is more interested in exploring memory as a catalyst for pain.

Both *Stasiland* and *NLMG* unveil the crucial role of memory in accepting the past and moving on in addition to its consolatory powers to relieve painful memories. Ishiguro's exploration of the desire to cling to memories of the past contributes to the more insightful interpretation of the avoidance of painful memories in *Stasiland*. At the same time, Funder's intricate portrayal of human relationships connected through memory facilitates a deeper understanding of the connection between mortality and memory in *NLMG*.

How do the authors explore the ways in which the people in power withhold information and hid reality from those with less power?