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Days of Past Futures: Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go as "Speculative Memoir"

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Abstract

This article considers Kazuo Ishiguro's dystopian novel *Never Let Me Go* as a text which utilizes memoir as a means of presenting a possible future where human rights are decimated, but where human stories remain. The novel is considered as an example of an ongoing science-fictional model where life-writing acts as a window into a world where the individual's experiences guide the reader through the speculative world.

DAYS OF PAST FUTURES: KAZUO ISHIGURO'S NEVER LET ME GO AS "SPECULATIVE MEMOIR"

KEITH MCDONALD

The autobiographical mode of writing is often thought to be a genre in itself, a genre where the self-penned life story of those in the public eye is marked out by publishers as having a worthwhile story to tell. These apparently true life accounts are often scrutinized for their authenticity, and this is often the case where writers bear witness to a traumatic event, an historical moment, or a perceived social injustice. Leigh Gilmore writes of the pitfalls that emerge when a writer represents trauma:

Because testimonial projects require subjects to confess, to bear witness, to make public and shareable a private and intolerable pain, they enter into a legalistic frame in which their efforts can move quickly beyond their interpretation and control, become exposed and ambiguous, and therefore subject to judgments about their veracity and worth. (7)

She goes on to suggest that in order to "navigate" this dilemma, "some writers move away from recognizably autobiographical forms even as they engage autobiography's central questions" (7). Examples of such works include popular autofictions, in which writers recast their own experiences in a hybrid narrative. Such examples include *The Farewell Symphony* (1995) by Edmund White, in which there is an account of the rise of the AIDS crisis told in a "fictional autobiography," and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), which depicts the plight of a socially excluded individual told from an autofictional perspective. These texts and others abandon the need for autobiographical authenticity, and suggest an alternative where a creative shaping of experienced events provides a conduit by which a fundamental "truth" is made available.

It is worth noting, however, that there is a clear argument to suggest that this debate over the authenticity of the autobiographical work, functioning

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