

The Loss of the Real in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, *Klara and the Sun* and *Nocturnes*

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*This paper addresses the issue of the loss of the real in the fiction of Kazuo Ishiguro as a contemporary author whose thought line is still in progress. His approach to this issue is anti-capitalist as he questions the so-called scientific advancement led by cash-oriented capitalists and industrialists. His writing seeks to strip the veil of the murderous nature of this kind of science. He blames it for killing the real and creating a world of simulations. He animadverts upon dystopian spaces where he holds postmodern scientific knowledge responsible for the digression of the natural course of life and lays bare the secrets behind the replacement of the real with the simulated by drawing attention to such debatable topics as human cloning, cosmetic surgeries and artificial intelligence. In terms of methodology of analysis, this paper is primarily based on a close examination of the author's literary texts: two novels (*Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun*) and three short stories from *Nocturnes* ("Malvern Hills", "Nocturne" and "Crooner"). Postmodernist concepts have been of great relevance to the analysis of these texts, for his fiction could not be approached in isolation from the realities of the postmodern era where it's produced. Equally, bearing in mind the author's socio-ethnic and historical background, the society where he lives and the politico-cultural transformations of the world after the Second World War plays an important role in the analysis of his texts.*

Keywords

The real; the simulated; loss; scientific knowledge; dystopia; human cloning; cosmetic surgery; artificial intelligence

Introduction

Ishiguro's fiction questions the way the real is attacked in the era of biotechnology, artificial intelligence and the cosmetic industry. It investigates fixed understandings of the issues of the real, the simulated and the imagined boundaries between them. It is an inquiry into the postmodern scientist's ability to alter the real under the banner of scientific progress. It is an alarm bell about the anomalies caused by the dominance of industrialist business-oriented mindsets. It is a plea to reflect on the impacts of so-called scientific development on the natural course of life in a capitalist world ruled by cash values and self-centred practices.

What Baudrillard calls the "loss of the real" in his *Simulacra and Simulation* (45) is implied in Ishiguro's fiction. Ishiguro draws attention to the growing feelings of doubt towards the real, given the fact that the boundaries between the real and the unreal is blurred in an international socio-cultural and geopolitical context dominated by pretentious superficial practices. He implies that the world of today has in a sense lost its allure as a destination for those who seek authenticity and originality as they are besieged by pseudo-authentic products manufactured by scientists. Artificial friends (robots) in *Klara and the Sun* serve as an example of these products.

The author alludes to the struggle of the postmodern human with the conflicting forces of the real and the simulated and how some people seek to alter their real physical identity to look better. They are made unsatisfied with their real bodies and convinced that the remedial operations suggested by the cosmetic industry can help them be more attractive. They escape their real authenticity by simulating their idol models of beauty, attractiveness and excellence and meeting the standards set by the architects of the culture of consumerism which, according to Miles, "appears to have become part and parcel of the very fabric of modern life" (1).

Thus, one of the postmodern themes which Ishiguro highlights in his fiction is what Baudrillard refers to in his *Simulacra and Simulation* as the "loss of the real" (45). He treats this theme for different reasons. First of all, he seeks to criticise advances in science which have contributed to this loss. He calls attention to the impacts of the power of biotechnology, namely human cloning, on the real world where we live. He highlights how cosmetic surgery murders the "real" in the world of art. He tries to launch a critique against this world, and more specifically to the music industry, showing it as full of

fake art and artists. Thus, he gears his focus towards the murderous side of science and industry in a cash-oriented world.

One more reason is that he seeks to show the growing sense of incredulity towards all that is thought to be real and original, placing emphasis on the ambivalent distinction between the “real” and the “simulated”. He also implies the idea that in a globalised world where artificial intelligence has become in vogue, the real is at risk. He seeks to reveal that robots have been developed in a way that can impact human life and put into doubt the belief that the real is immune to damage and falsification. The simulated artificial friends (AFs) are offered the power to make real humans, namely children, happy and cater for their needs. Through *Klara and the Sun*, Ishiguro warns against this simulation and shows the inability of these AFs to understand and cope with real human emotions.

A Critique of Postmodern Scientific Knowledge

Ishiguro raises the dialectic dyad of the real vs. the simulated in *Never Let Me Go* where he dwells on the transplantation of the simulated into the real. There is the surgical transfer of cloned organs into real ones. This makes the borderline separating the real and simulated blurred. In the words of Baudrillard, it is “the murder of the real” (*The Vital Illusion* 61). In this novel, the simulated copies are tortured and manipulated until death. Ishiguro seeks to hint at the mechanisation of human life, which disrupts the natural flow of life. He questions the intentions of what Lyotard calls “a shift in techniques and technology” in the age of “capitalism” (14).

In *Never Let Me Go*, real humans have the power to unzip cloned ones many times, use their organs for medical purposes and let them slowly die. The cloned youths accept this as their destiny. They raise questions about their real identities and want their donations to be deferred for some time to enjoy their lives before they die, but none of them refuses the donation programme and its lethal policy. Their lives are controlled by those who manufacture them and those who run the programme. Ishiguro intends to criticise this lethal manufacturing power. He possibly implies that the power of capitalism and industrialism is chaotic when it attacks the real.

The possible message that Ishiguro tries to impart is that seeing real humans and cloned ones interact with each other in one geographical, socio-cultural

and educational space is against nature and logic. In *Never Let Me Go*, real people like Madame, Miss Lucy and Miss Emily interact with clone youths like Ruth, Kathy and Tommy at the socio-cultural, geographical, human, emotional, educational and medical levels. Ishiguro holds the human mind responsible for the infringement on this logic and the disappearance of the real. This mind is part of the capitalist project which has turned every invention into a business. Ishiguro is drawing attention to the business dimension of human cloning. This is reminiscent of what Mandel says in *Late Capitalism*: “Invention becomes business” (249). According to him, this is “the situation” in which “all sciences have been pressed into the service of capital” (249).

In *Never Let Me Go*, the cloned human beings study and do all biological things (eating, drinking, sleeping and having sex), create works of art, travel, experience all sorts of feeling (happiness, sadness, anger, excitement, joy, surprise, and shock), criticise, and communicate like real humans, but in the long run, their lives are remote-controlled. They have to be used for medical purposes and die. This is the lifeline drawn for them by a donation system. This is the human problem highlighted in the history of the technology of human cloning as depicted in this novel. Ishiguro gears his criticism against the ideology of industrialists and capitalists who seek, in the words of Mandel, “a technical solution” (501) to medical problems. Ishiguro tackles the issue of human cloning which, as Woodward puts it, “may be uniquely controversial among scientific developments due to the powerful, fundamental questions it raises” (4). He raises questions about its objectives, its moral and legal dimensions, the way human clones are viewed, the way to deal with them, and how to consider their role in saving the lives of sick people.

Ishiguro makes allusions to science as a site of power, but this power is political and ideological as it leads to the transformation of the real. From a Gramscian perspective, Ishiguro politicises science. Gramsci raises the question of whether science is a “political activity and political thought, in as much as it transforms men, and makes them different from what they were before” (244). Ishiguro possibly considers the power of science murderous since it kills the real. What is held by industrialists as scientific progress turns out to be a murderer of all that is authentic and natural. Relationships are no longer real if the simulated steps into them blur the boundaries between the real and the artificial.

This issue of human cloning has a moral dimension. The act of unzipping the cloned youths (i.e., Kathy, Ruth and Tommy) to remove their organs and give them to others is plunder. This goes with “the familiar postmodern

point that we live in an age of plunder” (Frith 109). It is the plunder of the “real” and its replacement with the “simulated”. Copied human organs are appropriated and used by another. This is ethically unacceptable. Ishiguro criticises how advances in biotechnology have transformed capitalists and industrialists into looters and killers under the banner of so-called scientific progress. He shows the paradoxes of this progress. Those who survive thanks to the organs of the clones lose their real identities and establish copied ones. This operation reeks of egoism and opportunism.

Ishiguro is critical of this human cloning and the violence practiced by science on the human body. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard talks about this violence: “there lies the incredible violence of genetic simulation” and “modeling of the body” through which “the individual is destined to serial propagation” (99). The real is assassinated and supplanted with the simulated. In the words of Baudrillard, “what is lost in the work [of cloning] ... is its aura, its singular quality” and “the original” (99). In his description of Baudrillard’s idea of “the loss of the real”, Barry points out that “the distinction between real and imagined, reality and illusion, surface and depth” disappears, resulting “in a culture of ‘hyperreality’, in which distinctions between these [are] erode[d]” (64). If Baudrillard talks about the role of images from films, TV, and advertising in this disappearance, Ishiguro focuses on the killing power of advances in biotechnology and how it leads to the erosion of the distinction between the “real” and the “unreal”. Only those behind the donation programme know this distinction.

Ishiguro delves into the issue of cosmetic surgery as a kind of scientific knowledge. He hints at the idea that this knowledge is commoditised and used as a means to create wealth. This goes with the view of Lyotard that “knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold” in the postindustrial and postmodern age (4). It is “the mercantilization of knowledge” (5). While it is produced and consumed, the real disappears. Ishiguro takes his readers to the world of art to point to the power of appearance over reality; image and marketability over truth. He blames what Jameson calls “the contemporary world of consumer capitalism” (18) in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* for the death of the real.

This knowledge is a source of power for both its producers and consumers. Ishiguro highlights how this knowledge can widen socio-economic gaps between people. Not all people can have access to it. In “Nocturne”, Steve cannot have the medical surgery without the financial help of his ex-wife, Helen, and her new rich husband, Chris Prendergast. This latter pays “all the

hospital bills, recuperation, everything” (“Nocturne” 131–132). Thus, it is an elitist knowledge geared to a specific kind of consumer. It is discriminatory in nature. Those at the grass-roots level cannot have it. Implied here is that this commoditised scientific knowledge can create social disparities and economic differences among the rich and the poor.

This is in line with the conclusion of Lyotard that with the “preeminence” of science “in the arsenal of productive capacities of the nation-states, ... the gap between developed and developing countries will grow ... wider in the future” (5). In “Nocturne”, Lindy Gardener represents the developed world because she is financially able to have many surgeries to look beautiful. She represents those who are much concerned about what Combs calls “the maintenance and enhancement of the self” and “the construction of a more adequate self” using their money (9). She belongs to the camp of rich celebrities whose presence is so crucial for the continuity of this scientific knowledge whose impact on contemporary societies, real human identities and social bonds is undeniable. Still, cosmetic surgery does not represent the totality of scientific knowledge.

Ishiguro foregrounds an identity problem which Frith expresses in the form of this question: “how can we tell the difference between the ‘real’ and ‘simulated’?” (110). This difference is not clear. Ishiguro is criticising what Shmaefsky calls “the era of gene therapy” (126). In a society where clones and real humans interact with each other, it is difficult to know the distinction between the “real” and the “cloned”. To use the words of Hartley, “it may occasionally be difficult to determine whether what you’re looking at is real or constructed, original or replay” (6). With simulations, the vision of the real is blurred.

In *Klara and the Sun*, Ishiguro does possibly want to show that the human mind which produces such human-robot friendships is a hostage of a capitalist project which works towards spreading the possibility of melting humans with machines in one place to make money, mechanise life and make human bonds shallow. He criticises those who preach the idea that AF robots can help children build a happy life, showing that these robots are controlled by their Manager. In the window of the store, Klara and Rosa refer to this control: “In those circumstances, we both did as Manager had taught us: we put on neutral smiles and fixed our gazes across the street” (*Klara and Sun* 4). How can they help these children to be happy while their lives are controlled by their Manager? They are helpless machines, waiting for their turn to be

selected and taken home by passers-by. They are homeless and submissive. It's really an ironic situation to expect help from this kind of robot.

In so doing, Ishiguro possibly calls for the need to protect children from the greed of this mind and raise awareness about the risk of being with a machine. Like *Never Let Me Go*, *Klara and the Sun* is part of the author's effort to criticise the brutality of capitalist minds and industrialist schemes against children. While the first depicts a dystopian society where cloned children have to grow up to donate until death, the second warns against letting AF robots impact the lives of children. In each case, the objective is apparently noble, but deep down, it is not. Cloning children is done under the banner of saving the lives of humans, and producing AF robots is presented as a means of bringing happiness to children. Ishiguro implies that children should be far from these brutal intentions of industrialist mindsets.

Thus, upbraiding the dystopian side of the human mind is a recurrent topic in his fiction. He works towards unveiling the dark side of business-oriented science in the world of today in a repetitive way. Repeating certain themes is part of his style of writing fiction:

I usually repeat myself quite a lot in my novels. Some novels are a kind of rewrites of the previous book because I wanted to revisit that same terrain and explore it a little bit more or slightly differently or there was something not quite right about the last book and I wanted to do it again... so it's a good disguise... it might look like *Klara and the Sun* is a companion book to *Never Let Me Go* and it is in many ways... and there is a relationship between the two books. (Ishiguro on *Klara and the Sun*)

Klara and the Sun can be considered a kind of rewrite of *Never Let Me Go* as they both fall within the scope of science fiction. The stories of both are told from the perspectives of non-humans: a cloned human (Kathy) in *Never Let Me Go* and an Artificial Friend (Klara) in *Klara and the Sun*. Both novels show how science exerts its power on nature and how this nature resists this power which can create new forms of relationships (e.g., human-clone and human-machine relationships). They both belong to the category of science-fiction and take readers to dystopian worlds where the real is assassinated and supplanted with the simulated.

Really remarkable is that Ishiguro gives voice to robots like Klara to tell the story and narrate what real human beings do and say and how they interact.

At the very beginning of the story, in the store, these Robots argue about their need for the Sun to get power and energy. They even compete to get their portion of it. Without the Sun, they cannot survive. Rex describes Klara as greedy when “the Sun’s pattern” fades as she touches it (*Klara and the Sun* 1). Metaphorically speaking, the power of the Sun stands for the power of nature and the real. Implied here is the idea that replacing the real with the simulated cannot work as the latter cannot exist and survive without the former.

In this sense, the use of the word “greed” by Rex to describe Klara’s action is worth considering. Klara can be accordingly seen as the representative of the industrialists who exploit science for their materialistic interests. Her greed is a metaphor for their greed which prevents others from having their portion of nature as a source of life, real beauty and attractiveness. The Sun as a source of light, energy and strength, as said earlier, represents nature. Rex stands for those who are denied the right to get their share of the Sun and nature in general. He openly complains that he is becoming weak because of the greed of Klara: “Because of you, I’m going to become weak by evening” (*Klara and the Sun* 2). Incorporating the simulated into the real serves the interests of those who have the tools to produce business-oriented scientific knowledge and weakens those who are deprived of a real natural life.

Nature can be considered a force of dissidence in *Klara and the Sun*. The title can better help understand this idea. As an AF robot, Klara represents science in general and artificial intelligence in particular. The same thing is true for other AF characters like Rosa and Rex. The Sun stands for the power of nature without which life is hard and almost impossible. It is a source of life, nourishment, light, warmth, energy and strength. Rex says to Klara that touching just its pattern makes them strong: “That’s the Sun’s pattern right there. If you’re worried, you can just touch it and get strong again” (*Klara and the Sun* 1). They need the Sun to survive. Without it, they get weak and useless and the store where they are positioned “becomes very gloomy” (1).

Ishiguro wants to show how the natural real resists the power of science in the postmodern age. Those who use scientific knowledge to create robots to make children happy cannot succeed because of the dissidence of nature which is strong enough to show the weaknesses of the products of this knowledge. The power of the Sun as an element of nature surpasses that of AF robots. An AF robot grows lazy and powerless without the Sun: “an AF would feel himself growing lethargic after a few hours away from the Sun” (3). The Sun represents the strong real and the robots stand for the weak simulated.

Ishiguro tests the ability of AFs to understand human emotions, including happiness and anger. In other words, it is a test for science to understand every aspect of human nature. This can be illustrated with an example from the novel. Klara's preferable position in the store is to be in the window. It is not only because she wants to get nourishment from the Sun or be chosen by a customer, but it is also due to her desire to see the world outside the store: "Unlike most AFs, unlike Rosa, I'd always longed to see more of the outside – and to see it in all its detail" (4). She wants to discover the world of humans and the core of their nature, mainly in relation to their emotions, but she fails. It is the failure of the scientific endeavour to murder the real.

Klara makes a clear hint at the kindness of nature represented by the Sun: "the Sun and his kindness to us" (4). This can be considered a confession of science epitomised by AFs about the kindness of nature. Does Ishiguro seek to imply that science disrupts nature and treats it harshly by creating robots to play the role of making children happy? He is actually trying to draw attention to the robot business industrialists and their propaganda agenda which strives to make consumers believe that a robot can make a human being happy. He launches his critique of the way science is used to serve a culture based on cash values and denigrate human feelings and relationships. Thus, Ishiguro can be classified among those whom Thompson identifies as "historical pessimists" like Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber who regard "modernity as degeneration from a more authentic state of being" (16).

Ishiguro alludes to the idea that in this era of technology and new information, the voices of robots are heard more than those of real humans who turn out to be store managers, customers, consumers and visitors. He critically enquires into the world of machines which Deleuze and Guattari describe as being everywhere: "machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines" (1). With these machines, a digression from the natural course of life takes place. Everything can be produced and reproduced due to the power of these machines. The interaction of real humans with simulated and mechanised ones is against human nature. Ishiguro criticises science for creating companionships between robots and human beings, namely children. For instance, when the mother wants to buy Boy AF Rex for her daughter, the Manager of the store describes Rex as a great companion for her: "For the right child, Rex will make a perfect companion. In particular, I feel he'll encourage a conscientious and studious attitude in a young person" (*Klara and the Sun* 3).

The implication of this is that the mother and her daughter as real humans can rely on Rex as an AF to motivate the girl and encourage her to study and accompany her in her life. What a paradoxical situation! How can a man-made robot do such a job? Ishiguro is not only questioning the ability of these robots to make the lives of people better, but also the role of parents in the postmodern age. He wants to show that robots cannot replace parents, especially in matters related to feelings and emotions. Parents and families in general should not become hostages of these scientific advances. Parents are required to build real bonds of love and esteem with their children. This is possibly the message Ishiguro tries to give. He is, in a sense, critical of “the hegemony of ‘postmodern’ knowledge”, to quote Gonzalez (163).

Thus, Ishiguro questions the reliability of these friends and their ability to understand all the emotions and behaviours of people, namely those of children. He wants to imply that a machine remains a machine regardless of how sophisticated it is. When Klara describes Rosa as “happy” (4), does it mean that she is really happy or just programmed to be happy? AF robots can learn to be happy or angry, but their happiness or anger is just a mechanical response to a programmed stimulus. Klara depicts children who come to see them as excited and happy: “Many of these would be children, of around the age for which we were suitable, and they seemed happy to see us” (5). Once again, are these robots able to judge children as happy or excited? Are they qualified to understand human emotions? These are the questions postmodern scientific knowledge should sincerely answer. Does it really seek to bring happiness to children? Or does it just serve the capitalist interests of money-oriented industrialists? Ishiguro is trying to emphasise the idea that the emotions of these robots are never natural; they are artificial, and thus, parents should be careful before getting one for their children.

The ability of the real to resist the coming of the simulated can be also inferred from the reasons why Josie’s mother wants to buy Klara. At the beginning, readers learn that Klara is purchased to provide company for Josie, but later on, they come to find out that the mother has another reason to keep her. The mother sometimes asks Klara to imitate her daughter, Josie. The reason is that Josie is sick and stays most often in bed. Her elder sister, Sal, was also sick and died when Josie was very little. The mother could barely bear the grief over the loss of Sal, and she is afraid of losing Josie. It is the fear of death as an external force that makes her think of buying Klara and creating a replica of Josie through the process of imitation. It is the fear of losing her real daughter that makes her think of a simulated one. She is preparing herself

for the day when Josie will die. She asks Klara to “continue Josie” for her, that is to become “the exact same” as the real Josie (*Klara and the Sun* 126).

Ishiguro is trying to draw attention to the issue of how parents like Josie’s mother are worried about the loss of their children and seek the help of science to guarantee the continuity of their children through AF robots like Klara. She decides to ensure this continuity by seeking the help of Mr. Capaldi, a scientist who makes her believe that she can have an exact copy of Josie: “There’s nothing there. Nothing inside Josie that’s beyond the Klaras of this world to continue. The second Josie won’t be a copy. She’ll be the exact same and you’ll have every right to love her just as you love Josie now” (126). He is confident that Klara can be the real Josie. He believes that Klara will not be a copy and he argues that she will be the real Josie. The real is favoured over the copy. Scientists like Mr. Capaldi should not be trusted as no copy can match the real. This is possibly the message the author seeks to impart.

The possible intent of Ishiguro is to convey the idea that robots are just tools designed and created to do certain mechanical tasks as programmed by their producers, and, thus, they cannot be viewed as exact copies of real humans. Here, the real is championed over the copy, which implies that no matter how hard advances in technology try to replace or replicate the real, pure human nature is always there to resist and win. In the long run, humans are able to cope successfully with this imposed relationship with machines without losing their real authenticity. There is a touch of optimism in this discourse which regards humans as heroes and such man-made machines as robots as tools performing different tasks according to the needs of these humans.

In *Klara and the Sun*, Ishiguro advocates the idea that humans and robots cannot be treated as equal. This means, by implication, that the real and the simulated cannot be the same. Robot-human relationships are artificial and doomed to death. Ishiguro presents another vision in which machines and humans are never treated as equal. He shows a kind of favouritism to human tenets and principles over cash-based and business-oriented capitalist projects. Thus, *Klara and the Sun*, along with *Never Let Me Go*, can be seen as a critique of the advent of technoscientific projects of genetic modification and artificial intelligence which work towards changing humanity and claim to design and create a technological version of the human race. The author is very much worried about the question of what it means to be human in the post-human era in which humanity is required to accept co-existing with non-human entities and post-biological mechanisms like human clones and robots.

A Critique of the World of Art and Pretence

By tackling the issue of cosmetic plastic surgery in art and the pain associated with it, Ishiguro seeks to imply that the human mind can take human beings from the state of visibility to that of invisibility, taking into account Steve's confession in "Nocturne": "I'm still the Invisible Man" (144). Ishiguro also criticises the moral descent characterising the postmodern age in which the value of humans and art is reduced to having a beautiful face and attractive physical appearance. He draws attention to the devaluation of music and musicians and the injustice done to many true artists who stick to all that is real. He questions some of the practices in the music industry full of its many secrets and simulations. The bandages used in such surgery are a metaphor for these secrets and simulations. They stand for the invisible of this industry. What is beneath the bandages is dangerous. Those who choose to keep their originality are denied awards and trophies. The loss of the "real" is, thus, associated with secrecy, moral descent and nocturnal scheming.

This idea of "the loss of the real" can be approached in relation to Habermas's concepts of "representation", "public sphere", visibility and invisibility (7). Steve is very much concerned about his representation in public. As an artist, he wants to move from the state of invisibility to visibility by having a new face. Bradley, his manager, states that the obstacle to this movement is his ugly face ("Nocturne" 145). In the words of Habermas, Steve's old face is "something that has no life, that is inferior, worthless" and it "is not representable" (7). Thus, it is the source of his invisibility in the public sphere. In this case, the "real" turns out to be a stumbling-block to fame and wealth in the world of art. It has to be changed with the "simulated." It is the public presence of the new face which can make the invisible Steve visible. Ishiguro seeks to draw attention to this belittling view of the "real" in the world of art.

Ishiguro makes a reference to fake artists and describes them as "wankers": "It's just that there are many wankers going around writing songs" ("Malvern Hills" 91). The word "wanker" indicates that there are so many stupid people who do not deserve the label of artists. In "Nocturne", Lindy Gardner is depicted as a "figure who [epitomises] ... everything ... shallow and sickening about the world" ("Nocturne" 137). She is "a person with negligible talent" but she has "managed ... to become famous, fought over by TV networks and glossy magazines" through "the right love affairs, the right marriages, the right divorces" (137). Everything about her, including her fame and talent, is unreal. There are a lot of people just like her in the world of art. In the

words of Lindy, Ishiguro seeks to impart this message: "The world" of art "is so unfair", full of "the unblessed" who are unlucky (175).

Lee, Steve's friend, describes the world of art as "strange" and calls it "a screwed-up world" as a reaction to the news that Jake Marvell will take the award for Jazz Musician of the Year (148-149). Both of them think that Jake does not deserve it. Steve, talking to Lindy Gardener, describes Jake as being "nothing ... a phoney ... a bluffer" (152). There is even a reference to the idea of stealing the award at night. Lindy takes the award stealthily from a room in the hotel and wants to give it to Steve who sees it "like stealing" (161). Jake represents fake artists and Steve stands for real ones. Ishiguro tries to draw attention to the corruption of the world of art. The titles "Nocturne" and *Nocturnes* can be interpreted as a metaphorical reference to the nocturnal schemes in this world at the level of awards and recognition. Some artists do not deserve awards because their art is unreal. They just steal the art.

Ishiguro animadverts on the idea that it is the physical face which opens doors of fame and wealth for artists and not the quality of their music. Success "has to do with image, marketability, being in magazines and TV shows, about parties and who you [eat] with" (131). Steve rejects all this in such a way: "I don't want any doors opening for me other than ones that open because of my music" (147). He wants real artists to be appreciated for their real art with their real faces, and not something artificial and faked. Through Steve, Ishiguro stresses the importance of real faces in the world of real art. He possibly implies that cosmetic surgery as a techno-biological intervention to alter the real does not really serve the world of real art as it may create an atmosphere of injustice and triviality.

The cosmetic metamorphosis imposed on Steve is just a metaphor used by Ishiguro to show the transformation that the postmodern world has witnessed. It is a cosmetic transformation full of hidden schemes and illegal affairs. In "Nocturne", Dr. Boris represents the engineers of these schemes and affairs. Steve describes him in this way: "my hunch is Dr. Boris's stellar reputation is based on procedures that aren't one hundred per cent legal" (128). He operates on celebrities in a hidden place in a hotel. He changes their faces under the banner of making them beautiful. The face of either Steve or Lindy Gardener stands for the face of the world which is cosmetically bandaged to hide its pain, paradoxes, conspiracies, problems and worries.

This desire of Steve and Lindy Gardener to become other people through having new faces is a sign of the disrespect of the real. It is indicative of the lack of self-acceptance. The current self is seen as an obstacle to change. Bradley

tells Steve to remove this obstacle (145). Steve admits that it's "a mistake" and that he "should have had more respect for [himself]" (145). For the sake of money and fame, some people accept to have new faces every now and then and marry many times. Lindy informs Steve about her "third cosmetic surgery" (181). She changes her face the same way she changes husbands and clothes.

Lindy informs Steve that his wife, Helen, "might be a great person, but life's so much bigger than just loving someone" (182-183). The implication of this is that even real love is lost in the world of today. It is suggestive of the descent of ethics in this money-oriented world where everything can be changed, including faces, husbands, and wives, like changing clothes. Steve notes that his face surgery symbolises "more perfectly the scale of [his] moral descent" (137). He describes himself as a "pathetic hustler, getting [his] face fixed in a bid to crawl after the Lindy Gardeners of this world into vacuous celebrity" (138). It is a shallow, meaningless and faked fame. Ishiguro does possibly seek to criticise this rush towards changing the real.

Ishiguro launches a critique of the world of not only simulated and fake art but also of pretence. He hints at the idea that there is a tendency on the part of some people to behave, speak and act in a way through which they hide their real status quo and pretend something else. They get suspended between reality and appearance, between truth and pretence or the "real" and the "simulated". They reveal things which have nothing to do with their real identities. They resort to pretence as a tool to hide things they do not like about themselves, attract the attention of others, avoid shame and disgrace, or show their adaptive skills. The resort to pretence can lead to the loss of the real.

Some of Ishiguro's characters are entangled in this world of pretence. This can be interpreted from different angles. It can be viewed, for example, as a strategy to escape an embarrassing situation and look better. It can also be seen as a means to belittle others and make fun of them within the dynamics of class struggle. It can be part of a flattery game to make someone do something for you by feeding his or her ego. It can be equally used as a tool of irony when you pretend something and, deep down "below the waterline" in the words of Page (138), you mean the opposite.

Pretence is sometimes used a means to detach the self from an unwanted psychological condition and take it, at least for some time, to a better emotional and mental one. It is the process of masking reality for some time and pretending not to have problems at all. Pretence serves an escape route from this unwanted reality. It is a way to hide the real and replace it with the pretended. Making pretences is, thus, a way to escape an unwanted real

world. Leslie calls it “the ability to pretend” (412), which means that not all people can do it. Pretence is powerful as long as reality is undiscovered. But once reality forces itself into people’s lives, pretence loses its power and leaves its place to reality. Pretence, according to Leslie is a deliberate distortion of reality: “In pretence we deliberately distort reality” (412).

In *Never Let Me Go*, Ruth goes about this act of pretending so many times especially at the Cottages with the veterans. It is pretence in the dystopian world of the Hailsham School and Cottages. But her pretence is not meant to harm others or mock them. It is meant to show her adaptive capacities. She wants to show people in her new environment (the Cottages) that she can easily adapt to her new mode of life. For example, together with Tommy, they show their pretended love relationship in front of the veterans. They pretend that they love each other like those on TV (*Never Let Me Go* 93). They try to imitate the veterans blindly and do as they do while parting. They slap on each other’s arms (93). They pretend that they are like veterans in matters of love and that they are familiar with it. They know how to make it. This pretence is protective in nature. They both resort to it, namely Ruth, to escape being teased and mocked by the veterans.

The resort of the self to pretence to get out of trouble is also present in the second story “Come Rain or Come Shine” in Ishiguro’s *Nocturnes*. The example is Ray, the narrator of the story, who loses his temper at knowing that the title of Prince of Whiners in Emily’s diary refers to him and bursts out into wrath, screwing “up the offending page in [his] hand” (“Come Rain or Come Shine” 57). Such an action in a time of anger puts him in a difficult situation in which he finds his reaction pointless and he has to find out a way to conceal it before she comes back to the apartment. The first plan that comes to his mind to save the situation and get out of this unexpected plight is to pretend to have been “pathetically drunk” and “claim to have looked through her diary and attacked the pages in an alcoholic delirium” (62). He resorts to pretence as an escape route and as a way of avoiding being rebuked because of this incident, especially that he is a guest in Charlie and Emily’s apartment, coming from Spain to London, and the diary is something private.

In “Crooner”, Jan, a guitarist from Poland, lives in Venice. He finds himself in a situation where he has to change his real identity and pretend to be Venetian in order to get work, avoid social exclusion, and escape racism. He has to play another instrument and wear other clothes which all belong to the Venetian culture and not to his parent one. It is the power of simulation over reality. It is the loss of the “real” because of feelings of foreignness. Ishiguro

possibly interrogates the racial treatment of immigrants in the so-called democratic western world and how this treatment leads to their self-disguise and cultural transfiguration. As Frith puts it, identity is “a becoming and not a being” (109), Jan and “the big Czech guy” have to become other people in Venice. It is not about who they really are, but about who and what they should become.

Pretence and appearance are closely interconnected in Ishiguro’s fiction. They can both help people look better. With every pretence and new appearance, identity can be re-defined. There is a sort of a make-believe game in which one’s appearance is mere pretence. In “Nocturne”, Lindy is very much concerned with the appearance of her body. As a celebrity, she wants to keep herself physically attractive and young. She needs cosmetic surgery to change her face and look better. This change is a must to achieve fulfilment and preserve her social status. Keeping the old face is an obstacle to all this. Through Lindy, Ishiguro seeks to stress the idea that the maintenance of the real can be difficult and that human identities are in a constant stage of construction and reconstruction in an ever-changing world ruled by cash values. People strive for a better life and future, and, in so doing, they need to go through “the process of being and becoming” which Combs sees as a defining feature of “life” and as a way to seek “fulfilment” (6). The loss of the “real” in this case is a way to be and become better.

Conclusion

Ishiguro’s fiction can be considered an uncharted land where the encounter of the real with the simulated takes place. He draws attention to the postmodern age characterised by the loss of the real and the spread of the culture of consumerism which makes simulation a way to get money for industrialists and achieve physical attractiveness for consumers. He highlights this loss to launch his critiques against such scientific advances as human cloning, artificial intelligence and cosmetics, blaming them for the murder of the real and the digression of the nature of human life. Real humans are surrounded with robots, cloned people, artificial human organs and cosmetic products.

He also animadverts upon the world of art, showing it as a space full of injustice, pretence, and faked artists. He launches a critique of a global capitalist system which gives priority to money over moral values. He expresses his concern about the future of humanity with the advent of advances in techno-

biology. His fiction serves as a warning against the risks of the intersecting lives and worlds of humans and non-humans. It is an alarm bell about the dangers of the decentering of the human, “where the human is no longer the centre of life on Earth”, to use the words of Nayar (11) under the banner of scientific progress.

The “real” disappears and leaves its place to pretence. Ishiguro seeks to show that this movement from reality to pretence and vice versa is characteristic of the postmodern age. This pretence can be caused by such negative emotions as hatred and rancour, and result in hailing indirect insults at others. He possibly wants to show that this kind of pretence is an indicator of the vacuum from which those who make pretence suffer. It is principally a moral void, which shows the fall of Man from the world of ethics which glorifies all that is human and real to that of savagery which succumbs to the power of evil and pretence. He also intends to reveal the internal conflicts inside this Man and throw some light on the complex relationship which binds him to others.

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