

ACT II, Scene II

Reflections With Tommy

[The crusty study room of Hill Hall, Monday afternoon, HANSINI and HER THOUGHTS]

HANSINI

In the dystopian world of Kazuo Ishiguro's "Never Let Me Go," Ishiguro emphasizes many themes of growing up, being young, and the trivial matters of life through the lens of the lead Kathy. Even though the world is structured differently from our own universe, many of these matters and themes are mirrored in our personal experiences and lives. This is especially true for me through the character of Tommy, Kathy's friend. As he faces the hardships and small matters of life at Hailsham and beyond, his character resonates with me greatly through his similar experiences of feeling outcasted, being sentimental, and wanting to be validated and accepted by his peers who harshly shunned him and painted him as the odd one out.

Tommy became a joke to his peers very early on in his school years, being teased and bullied for his lack of skill in arts, which everyone in the novel treasures. He quickly became the laughing stock amongst his peers and he struggled with being singled out and outcasted by them. Even after his time at Hailsham, Tommy is remembered as the odd one out. Ruth goes as far as saying "What you've got to realise...is that even though Tommy was at Hailsham, he isn't like a real Hailsham student. He was left out of everything and people were always laughing at him"(page 149). Ruth essentially singles him out, painting him as the outcast of the school. Tommy was considered a deviation of what they considered normal, leading to them outcasting him and targeting him for jokes. He was thought of as different because of his lack of skill when

it came to art so his peers often poked fun at him, leading to his detrimental experiences of being singled out and seen as the oddity of Hailsham.

Tommy's experiences of being outcasted resonate with me deeply as I grew up feeling singled out and isolated from my peers in predominantly white communities where nobody could exactly relate to my upbringing. My cultural and racial differences from the people around me truly made me feel outcasted, especially when my peers weren't subtle about viewing me differently from themselves. Oftentimes in middle school when I became more aware of my differences, my white peers would question me and poke and prod at my skin color or my physical differences of being Sri Lankan. On one occasion a classmate walked up to me and performed a mockery of classical Indian dancing despite me not even being Indian, making me feel like I was a joke to them. Growing up in areas lacking diversity highlighted how culturally different I was in those regions, making me feel incredibly isolated and outcasted the same way Tommy felt outcasted by all the children at Hailsham for being different from what they find normal. A lot of my upbringing was deeply impacted by how my younger self felt like a freakshow among the white girls I compared myself to and I see a piece of Tommy in the social isolation and harassment I faced growing up.

Even in the face of being singled out and outcasted, Tommy still craves validation and acceptance from his peers. At the beginning of the novel, Kathy describes the scene of Tommy being excited to finally play sports with his peers. Kathy says "Maybe even then, when I saw Tommy rushing about that field, undisguised delight on his face to be accepted back in the fold again, about to play the game at which he so excelled..."(page 12) Tommy is about to be harassed in this scene and teased by his peers, but the excitement before the bullying unfolds

reveals how he wants to be accepted and validated by his peers. Despite the bullying that they put him through because they believe he doesn't fit in, he still wants to be a part of a larger group of people and be accepted by them.

I empathize with Tommy's desire to be accepted by a large group of peers and seek validation from them. Growing up, I spent a lot of time craving to fit in and be accepted by people around me and I would find myself trying to appease them. Throughout much of grade school, I would try to fit in as much as I possibly could while conforming to both Sri Lankan cultural expectations and American cultural expectations. At school, I found myself going as far as reading books I was completely uninterested in just so I could feel like I had something to relate to with my peers. In my earlier years of middle school, I used to take make-up to school in the morning and apply it there to create a false sense of fitting in. Tommy's own sense of craving acceptance rings true with me and my struggle throughout middle school being around absolutely no diversity and clashing cultural expectations.

As the characters of the novel develop and mature throughout the storyline, Tommy's characteristic of being sentimental is brought to light as he grows older. He especially demonstrates this through his friendship with Kathy and he expresses his appreciation and love for her through the notion of trying to find her lost cassette tape, which was very dear to her. Tommy says "So I tried to find it. I never told you at the time, but I did try really hard. I thought there'd be places I could look where you couldn't. In boys' dorms, stuff like that. I remember looking for ages, but I couldn't find it" (page 243). He reveals how much he cares about trying to help her find her lost tape, especially as he continues to try to search for it in Norfolk long after

leaving Hailsham. He genuinely remembers and cares about Kathy's tape and wants to help her recover it even years later in Norfolk, demonstrating his characteristic of sentimentality.

Tommy's sentimentality is a trait I see in myself as I value little things people in my life hold close to themselves and I try to honestly express how much I appreciate and care for them through remembering such things. My love language is essentially demonstrating to people that I remember the little things about them and value them deeply, especially when I give gifts. For my best friend's seventeenth birthday I remembered her favorite baby picture and painted it for her because I knew how much she values the baby picture and the emotionally charged memories behind it. I'm essentially very nostalgic and sentimental when it comes to my friends and I connect to how Tommy cares about Kathy's lost cassette tape. The little things and more sentimentally charged aspects of gift-giving and caring for people matter deeply to me and I can feel for Tommy's sentimentality.

Tommy D. faces a lot of struggles in "Never Let Me Go," and we're allowed insight into his life and how he grew up through Kathy's perspective. Reading the novel truly made me feel connected to Tommy and the trivial matters he faced at Hailsham and beyond. Everything about him feeling singled out, wanting to be accepted by his peers, and being sentimental all resonate with me a great deal. I felt socially isolated growing up around people so vastly different from myself and I struggled with wanting to fit in the same way Tommy struggled with such similar matters. Despite those struggles, we share the similarity of sentimentality and feeling connected to people through remembering and valuing the little things about life. In essence, Tommy's character truly helped me reflect on my middle school years which played such an incredible role in shaping my feelings of social isolation, wanting to fit in, and sentimentality, and I can

honestly recognize my significant growth since then with a little more respect towards myself and my differences.

[She exits]