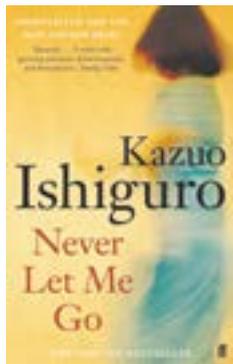




Reading Group Round-up

Promoting reading and reading groups in prisons

The report this month comes from HMP Ashfield where the group discussed Kazuo Ishiguro's 2005 novel, *Never Let Me Go*, later made into a film with Carey Mulligan and Keira Knightley. The group's choice was timely since the author has just been awarded the 2017 Nobel Prize for literature.



The young people at Hailsham School believe that they are special. In this alternative future some young people are raised to be organ donors. After a maximum of 4 'donations' they will complete i.e. die. Yet the students at Hailsham believe they are special - that there

is a way in which they can be released from these duties.

I was dreading the discussion. I had found *Never Let Me Go* an incredibly bleak book. Was it a dystopian novel, a horror novel, or coming-of-age? How would the group view a novel where people passively offer up their bodies, isolated from the outside world, where they rely on rumour and self-generated 'truth' to make sense of their lives, where language is twisted to hide its true meaning, and death is a 'donation' away. Actually, this novel gave us one of our most interesting discussions.

The group found the book pretty easy to read. The descriptions are sparse, the use of images all the more striking because of that. 'I found I could see it all in my head.'

'I could imagine Norfolk as this forgotten place. It's so far off the beaten track. Who goes there?'

Haunting

'Right from the start, the clues are there. That figure in the woods that they were all scared of. That could have been the start of a horror novel.' The group nod. I wonder if, like me, they hadn't paid that much attention at the beginning.

Plot

'I found myself waiting for the twist. I mean it kept me reading, and you know this isn't my kind of thing, but I kept reading to find out what happened. I suppose the fact that there wasn't a twist, that Kathy and Tommy aren't saved, that's the twist.'

We discuss the myths and half-truths that the young people are told. 'Would it have been better to have known the truth right from the start?'

The stories we tell ourselves

The whole group smiled at how easily myth and rumour travelled through the school, influencing the decisions people made, just like in prison. Is this novel similar to anything else

you've ever read? The group shake their heads. 'Just Russian prison novels. One Day In The Life, that kind of thing.'

Bleakness

'I really enjoyed it. I wouldn't normally read something set in an alternate future but this seemed realistic.'

'I had thought it would be more of a romance. I really thought Tommy and Kathy would finally get together, at the end.'

'They do!' the group say. 'Yes but not like THAT. Not nursing him through his final donation.' 'And dying. It's absolutely true. Anyone who's nursed a loved one. You can only go so far with them.'

Art

In the novel the students of Hailsham put great store in their creative abilities. They are encouraged to write, draw, and paint. They invest their creations not simply with trading value but with something greater; that will give them freedom.

'They use it to show that they are worth considering. That they aren't monsters.' There is recognition amongst the group. 'That's why they get us to enter the Koestler.'

Passivity

Despite their narrow prescribed lives none of the characters rebel against their lives.

'Why wasn't there a rebellion?'

Some of us think the lack of rebellion is realistic. 'It's the same in here. Some will go up against the system but most just want to get through it with minimal hassle.'

The Ashfield group is supported by Prison Reading Groups (PRG). If your prison doesn't already have a reading group, encourage your librarian to have a look at our website www.prison-reading-groups.org.uk PRG is part of Give a Book www.giveabook.org.uk

TurningPages

Prisoners who can read teach prisoners who can't

If you would like more information on how to become involved, as either a Mentor or a Learner, contact the Reading Plan Lead in your prison (ask a Shannon Trust Mentor who this is) or write to: Shannon Trust, Freepost RTKY-RUXG-KGYH The Foundry, 17-19 Oval Way, LONDON SE11 5RR.

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Time to pause...

National Prison Radio

In November, we'll be taking a pause from our usual programming on NPR to mark Remembrance Day.

At 11am on Saturday 11th November, there will be a two-minute silence across the country to remember all those who have lost their lives in armed conflict. It's a chance for a moment of reflection, and like many communities across the UK, we'll be taking time to pause. So join us if you can.

"This is where the veterans in custody will come and say a prayer to the fallen. It's a place where people can come and sit in solitude and reminisce"

Steve, a veteran at HMP Doncaster in the memorial garden.

What is Remembrance Day?

Remembrance Day - sometimes called Armistice Day - falls on 11th November. Originally it marked the end of the First World War. Now,

each year at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, a two-minute silence is observed to remember all those who fought in World War I, World War II, and all conflicts since.

Remembrance Sunday takes place on the second Sunday in November - this year it's Sunday 12th. On this day, there are usually ceremonies at war memorials, cenotaphs and churches throughout the country, as well as abroad. The Royal Family and top politicians gather at The Cenotaph in Whitehall, London, for a memorial service to honour all who have suffered or died in war.

The Remembrance Day silence is part of a whole week of Remembrance programming you can hear on NPR. We're paying tribute to people across the world who have been affected by war.

Tune in on Wednesday 8th November for a special edition of Roll Call, where we'll take a tour of the memorial garden at HMP Doncaster.

We'll also be discussing the importance of remembrance with Iain Downie from the Royal British Legion Industries.

"Remembrance Day is a crucial time in recognising the bravery and valour of those who fought with courage, many of whom sadly lost their lives. We pay homage to them on this day so that we recognise their memory and the everlasting effect their sacrifice has had."

Brigadier Steve Sherry CMG OBE, Chief Executive of Royal British Legion Industries.



Lynn Hill

On Thursday 9th November we'll meet Lynn Hill on Sound Women - she's a former drone operator in the US army, who's now using poetry to explore the damaging impact of modern warfare.

You'll be able to hear both these shows again on Remembrance Sunday, 12th November.

"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old: Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them."

Laurence Binyon, For The Fallen

Plus there will be loads more on air throughout the week - including stories of ex-service personnel from across the prison estate.

Tune into Remembrance Week on National Prison Radio from Monday 6th November.

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