

Thoughts on Girls' Last Tour

Background

I initially read and watched Girls Last Tour around late January, 2020. I thought it was great; the manga especially so.

I finish re-reading it in mid-July, 2024, I must say that GLT is brilliant. Here, I am going to note some thoughts I had while reading the series.

GLT is a melancholic, bleak, and yet somewhat comfortable slice of life, post-apocalyptic story of two girls and their journey. The story is told through chapters that see the girls operate through the post-apocalyptic world, navigate through what the "ancient people" did, and deal with issues of philosophy- primarily in the categories of meaning and hope.

It's tough. I don't even know where to begin my observations. I feel like it's not particularly interesting to re-hash scenes from the manga. I will focus here on more original analysis/things I think other people don't hit on.

I felt a sense of dread reading this, and as the ending I knew came closer, I was shocked to notice details I hadn't before. I was choked up at a few moments during the final chapters. Overall, it was an 'engaging-enough' read, made tough by the sense of dread I had as I knew what the ending entailed. I say 'engaging-enough' because I read GLT almost like a collection of philosophical observations told through the two characters. It's not supposed to be some grandiose fantastical epic.

The story is generally light-hearted for being set in a post-apocalypse, but gets more bleak as it goes on, I feel.

As a side-note, I feel that it is easy to dismiss the idea of a manga series having a serious philosophical nature because of the reputation or feeling or optics of Japanese media. Some of that, I feel, is legitimate. It doesn't take a genius to see that Japanese media tends toward the...morally ambiguous...and this extends to the author, Tsukumizu. I'm not going to tackle this issue in depth here, but I felt it necessary to include- especially for people that aren't traditionally fans of manga.

Bits of Analysis

This story is filled with many philosophical observations from Tsukumizu. I feel that the most poignant moral of GLT is that "A story must end for it to have meaning." The formula for true life is existence + enjoyment + death. This is why an ending which sees the girls survive COMPLETELY nullifies the story. There is no Girls' Last Tour if the tour goes on forever.

"Maybe life means something that has an end."

[Yuuri, Chapter 24]

I found myself thinking during the story that the girls could survive quite a bit longer and avoid danger by being more careful, but that's exactly the opposite of the point of GLT. The point is that the

girls know the end is coming. The mushroom-aliens basically tell them that the people they met are dead. So, instead of eking out a meager existence, maximizing their lifespans; they boldly enjoy their adventure. They get sidetracked (rocket-ship, library). They do as they please. This, because an adventurous life is superior to a meek and mundane forever.

Why, though? Even if we understand and abide by this moral, it's still 'hopeless' in the end. Hopeless, in that life inevitably comes to a close and that eventually all will be forgotten in the vast expanse of time. It's because:

“Even when you know it's all going to end one day, you can't not do something.”
[Chito, Chapter 43]

Be that making maps, building an airplane, building a city, or collecting books.

So, “A story must end for it to have meaning.” I feel, is the ultimate point of the story.

I find myself struggling to grapple with it because if something must have an end for it to have meaning, then what of the afterlife?

If reincarnation, or an eternity in the afterlife is true, then is all of life and death AND afterlife meaningless? Or is this our one and only shot? The afterlife itself a kind of wishful thinking- that we want desperately for the journey to continue.

It's interesting to note that in somewhat of a contradiction, the story closes with what one could call a scene from the afterlife.

When faced with a story like this, with an issue as complex as meaning, I feel like at some point that we may simply not be equipped to correctly grapple with this issue. We don't know if there is an afterlife and so we must operate with the understanding that we should enjoy life while it's here- even if it's all 'hopeless' in the end. Perhaps the quote:

“I don't have all the answers, but living was the best, wasn't it?”
[Yuuri, Chapter 47]

Story-Specific Points

The observations I'm going to make here are the best I can do for now; meaning, hope, and memories are all difficult concepts to succinctly write about- especially in the context of this story.

Chito attempts to cling to memories through her journal and the camera. She does this because “oblivion” is forgetting, as is defined by Yuuri and the Tower 6 AI. The point from T6AI is that an infinite lifespan is not worthwhile because you experience “an infinite accumulation of memories, and an infinite accumulation of loss (of memories.)”

Chito's belongings serve to kind of 'ground' her in the world. She fears death, and letting go of the material- the things that remind her of memories, the books she enjoys, serve to almost bring her closer to death. It's inevitable, but scary. She overcomes this, though, eventually burning her books for the sake of a fire. She lets go, able to embrace the idea that T6AI and Yuuri have; that while the books

do provide her some joy in life- she doesn't need the books in the end. The idea that remaining shackled to physical belongings at this stage is counterproductive- it stops her from living in the present and continuing the adventure.

In the end, it's the relationship between Chito and Yuuri that has the most value, and which came the closest to permanence. Not a book, not a journal, and not a camera. It was something that the people they came across lacked, a friend. A huge piece of meaning in ones' life, someone you love. Tsukumizu in the afterword of Volume 2 says:

“Reading it over again, I think Ishii (and Kanazawa too) must have been terribly lonely...Do we humans start building airplanes and whatnot when we're lonely...? Perhaps they were envious of Chito and Yuuri, who have the luxury of living together. I get envious of these two girls I draw all the time too. ‘Ahh...living just for the sake of living...How great would that be?’ I think as I pet my outdoor dog.”

[Tsukumizu, Volume 2]

This rings especially true considering that it's revealed in Chapter 31 that Kanazawa had lost his (what appears to be) lover by the time he met the girls.

Another thing I noticed, in the vein of hope, was that at the start of Chapter 14, the girls both express hopelessness at their situation, Chito despairing in it, and Yuuri sort of at terms with it. Chito worked at the Kettenkrad not long before she began despairing in hopelessness, while Ichii worked at her plane for years- to then see it fail, feel the hopelessness of life, but come to terms with it.

“She's learned to cope with things as they come...she's hit it off with hopelessness.”

[Yuuri, Chapter 16]

This alludes to the ending, where Chito finally learns to hit it off with hopelessness the way Yuuri does when faced with death.

Abrupt Conclusion

I wrote the bulk of this immediately after finishing GLT. I had a break between the initial draft and the final cut, which makes further analysis a bit difficult as my recollection of events is obviously less precise.

I think I've hit on the major points, and after watching the anime, I feel that it's always cool to see the characters you imagine play out on the screen.

That said, the anime is ultimately too 'positive' and disrupts the atmosphere of the story. The music especially detracts from what is otherwise supposed to be an underlying feeling of dread and emptiness in the world. The pacing is also slow in comparison to the manga- which itself can be slow...which makes the anime an un compelling watch, which pains me to say. I rate it a 4/10.

There's more I could delve into, such as ending theories, but I feel that what I have here is sufficient for now.