

Reliving the Past: Autobiographical Memory in Kazuo

Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

Dr. Salman Mohammed Salama

Faculty of Education – English Department

Damanhour University – Egypt

Abstract

This paper offers a new psychological reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* by indicating how autobiographical memory serves three main functions in the novel: directive, social and self-representative. The paper is meant to extend the argument regarding the importance of memory in Ishiguro's fiction. Narrated in first person by Kathy, the novel depicts how autobiographical memories help Kathy, the novel's protagonist, maintain social bonds with her two friends, create a coherent self-identity and regulate her mood and cope with the grief and anxiety caused by what lies before her. The article investigates how the situations Kathy passes by activate specific personal memories that assist her to hold on as the novel's title suggests. The discussion places an emphasis on the link between autobiographical memory and survival, in a way through which Kathy's personal memories enhance her sense of self, her social interaction and her sense of existence and continuity.

Keywords: Autobiographical Memories, AMs, Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, Memory.

1. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro is a British novelist and short-story writer born in Nagasaki, Japan in November 1954. Ishiguro's family immigrated to the United Kingdom in 1960 when he was just five years old. In 1978, Ishiguro attended the University of Kent, Canterbury, where he got a B.A. in English and Philosophy. After that, he got an M.A. in creative writing from the University of East Anglia in 1980. Ishiguro is considered one of the most notable contemporary novelists. He received many awards such as Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize¹ in 1982, the Whitbread Prize² in 1985, the Man Booker Prize³ in 1989, the Order of the British Empire⁴ in 1995, Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres⁵ in 1998, the Order of the Rising Sun⁶ in 2018 and the Knight Bachelor⁷ in 2018. This paper

¹ It is an annual literary award that was awarded by the Royal Society of Literature from 1967 to 2003 for the best regional literary work. It is named after the English novelist Winifred Holtby (1898-1935).

² Five annual literary prizes that are funded by Whitbread Breweries and chosen by the Booksellers Association of Great Britain and Ireland. The prize was renamed Costa Book Awards in 2006.

³ It is an annual literary prize that is given to the best original English novel published in the UK.

⁴ It is the most famous British order of chivalry which is awarded to contributions in arts and sciences.

⁵ It is an Order of France sponsored by the Minister of Culture and is awarded to important contributions in arts and literature.

⁶ It is a Japanese order which is awarded to distinguished figures who have made contributions in culture, arts, sciences, international relations and public welfare.

investigates Ishiguro's sixth novel, *Never Let Me Go*, which is the winner of the German Corine International Book Prize and the Italian Serono Prize. In 2005, the Time Magazine considered his novel, *Never Let Me Go*, as the best novel of the year and included it in the magazine's list of the 100 best English-language novels published since 1923. The novel's title "*Never Let Me Go*" refers to one of the songs in a fictional album that Kathy H., the novel's protagonist, finds at the "Sale"; the album is called "*Songs After Dark*" (p. 66) by Judy Bridgewater. Kathy used to dance to this song during her days at the mysterious boarding school of Hailsham. Shortlisted for the 2005 Man Booker Prize for Fiction, the novel has been translated into more than a dozen languages and was adapted into an award-winning film directed by Mark Romanek and released in 2010.

In 2017, Ishiguro was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his emotional fiction that is most associated with memory and self-delusion. Ishiguro's notable novels are *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), *The Remains of the Day* (1989), *The Unconsoled* (1995), *When We Were Orphans* (2000), *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and *The Buried Giant* (2015). He also wrote a collection of short stories entitled *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* in 2009.

Susannah Radstone (2000) maintains that "memory" has become an important topic in academic research. She declares that memory is now "both a central and an organizing concept within research in the humanities and in certain branches of the social sciences" (p. 1). Ishiguro's fiction is most preoccupied with memories and the potential to forget current pains and relieve emotional agony and psychological distress. His protagonists continuously attempt to overcome emotional void and psychological anxiety by reminiscing about their pasts. Ishiguro says in an interview by Knopf Publicity:

I've always been interested in memory, because it's the filter through which we read our past. It's always tinted – with self-deception, guilt, pride, nostalgia, whatever. I find memory endlessly fascinating, not so much from a neurological or philosophical viewpoint, but as this tool by which people tell themselves things about the lives they've led and about who they've become (Ishiguro, 2000, para. 5)

Ishiguro's novels take readers on compulsory journeys into the memories and minds of his protagonists; therefore, his narratives portray how his characters cope with the traumatic events that surround them by living through their personal memories. Consequently, buried pasts, once

⁷ It is one of the British honours systems in which the monarch appoints a man as a knight and gives him the title Sir.

disclosed and recalled to mind, emerge as remedy to present anguish and predicament through remembering what has been lost. In this paper, I offer a new psychological reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* which indicates how autobiographical memory serves three main functions in the novel: directive, social and self-representative. To frame this argument, I first briefly describe several theoretical views of autobiographical memory in psychology. Then, I turn to an explication of the role of autobiographical memory in helping Kathy maintain social bonds with her two friends, create a coherent self-identity and regulate her mood to cope with the grief and anxiety caused by what lies before her. I use this framework in my textual analysis to interpret Kathy's behavior, and I end the discussion with a conclusion that sums up the functions served by autobiographical memory in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. If autobiographical memory is really a unique human capacity, what has it changed in the life of Kathy?

2. Autobiographical Memory in Psychology

The term Autobiographical Memory refers to our consciously recollected personal memories regarding certain people, objects, places or events. This type of memory generally includes information about the individual's life and his/her personal experiences and emotions. Although the term Autobiography has been long tackled as a literary genre since Augustine's *Confessions* which is considered as the first autobiography in western culture, the term Autobiographical Memory is comparatively new. The scientific study and investigation of autobiographical memory in psychology has only started since the mid-1980s when a call has been made by some leading psychologists such as Ulric Neisser to examine and study personal memory and life history; thenceforth, interdisciplinary research conducted on autobiographical memory has generated a lot of controversial and theoretical debates: Conway and Rubin (1993) pinpoint that autobiographical memories are personally relevant, whereas Nelson (1993) highlights the functional significance of autobiographical memories and their vital role in maintaining social bonds and defining the self. David Matsumoto (2009) pinpoints the main characteristics of autobiographical remembrance; he defines the term as a "vivid form of episodic memory about one's personal past experiences often characterized by a sense of meaning, clarity of details, and a sense of certainty of accuracy, the latter of which has not been supported by research findings" (p. 68). These mental representations of the individual's self in the past may include personal memories for childhood or teenage experiences, and they play an important role in forming the individual's self-concept. Fivush (2011) defines autobiographical memory as "self-referenced memory of personal experiences in the service of

short-term and long-term goals that define identity and purpose" (p. 561), and he also refers to a very component of autobiographical memory known as auto-noetic awareness which is the "conscious experience of self as recalling the past" (p. 561), or in other words, the "awareness of self as the experiencer of the event in the past and the rememberer of the event in the present" (p. 562). In this way, Fivush considers the sense of identity or the self representative function as the real purpose behind recalling autobiographical memories, and through remembering and auto-noetic awareness, he believes, one can place past events in order and create a personal narrative or history.

Previously, the conducted research on memory has not obviously differentiated between autobiographical memory and episodic memory. Tulving (2002) clarifies that episodic memory involves two main components: first, memory of what, where, and when the experience is; second, mental time travel or the consciousness of the self that experienced the event. Unlike episodic memory, autobiographical memory is not just a series of past events, but it forms a life narrative by connecting past events collectively into a personal history (McAdams 2001), and it serves social functions such as self-definition and self-regulation (Bluck & Alea 2002). Accordingly, this unique system of autobiographical reminiscence not only recollects and narrates past personal experiences, but also uses these memories to create a consistent self-identity over time. Conway (2008) defines autobiographical memories as "episodes recollected from an individual's life" (p. 22), and he identifies four dimensions of it:

- 1- Autobiographical memories may sometimes consist of biographical facts
- 2- ... memories vary in the extent to which they are copies or reconstructions of the original event.
- 3- Autobiographical memories may be *specific or generic*.
- 4 Autobiographical memories may be represented from an *observer* perspective or from a *field* perspective (p. 23).

The first dimension means, during autobiographical remembrance, the individual may recollect some factual memories regarding himself and his past life. The second dimension indicates that some personal memories seem like "copies or reconstructions of the original event" since they contain a substantial amount of irrelevant detail and they are usually merged with the individual's interpretations with the benefit of hindsight. The third dimension points out that autobiographical memory might be regarding a particular or general occasion. The fourth dimension points at the fact that some autobiographical memories are recollected from the

viewpoint of the individual who has experienced them (the field perspective), while others are remembered from the perspective of an external observer and cannot be copies of the original but reconstructed ones (the observer perspective).

Conway (2008) also highlights three main functions that are served by the retelling of our autobiographical memories: "directive, social, and self functions" (p. 23). The directive function of autobiographical memory "involves using memories of past events to guide and shape current and future behaviour, as an aid to problem-solving, and as a tool for predicting future behaviour" (p. 24). Conway clarifies that the general knowledge that has been conceptualized from our past experiences may help us in problem-solving via searching back through our autobiographical memories until we find a similar past experience to the current problem that we are confronted with. This autobiographical knowledge also helps us cope with different problems that may arise in social contexts. Fivush (2011) refers to the directive function of autobiographical memory as "self-regulation", and elucidates that the process of reminiscence and recollecting autobiographical memories has "the ability to create emotionally coherent narratives of specific stressful experiences is related to well-being" (p. 575). This means that the individuals who create coherent autobiographical narratives out of their emotional and personal experiences show higher levels of happiness, comfort and physical health.

The social function of autobiographical memory means that "sharing memories provides material for conversation and therefore facilitates social interaction, and people become friends by exchanging personal narratives" (p. 24). Revealing autobiographical memories to individuals who are not involved in these memories means more sympathy, intimacy, and mutual understanding; consequently, autobiographical memories may help strengthen social bonds and make a conversation more convincing and credible. Fivush (2011) calls this social function of autobiographical memory "self in relation", and he pinpoints that "autobiographical memories serve to create and maintain social and emotional bonds with others through reminiscing" (p. 574). In this way, sharing our autobiographical memories with others is a meaningful social activity. This is, in fact, a human tendency to share references to our past and our personal experiences in order to keep social and emotional bonds with others.

The third and most important characteristic of autobiographical memory is its relationship to the self. Conway (2008) asserts that the recollected events "are of personal significance and are the database from which the self is constructed" (p. 25). He also clarifies that our personal history "is

of great importance as it is an essential element of our personal identity" (p. 25). This means that autobiographical knowledge constitutes what the self is, and it also helps maintain a sense of identity and gain a personal perspective about life events. Fivush (2011) calls this function "self-definition" as he believes that "autobiographical memory is a personal history that defines who one is across time and contexts" (p. 574). Accordingly, autobiographical memory and sense of self are intertwined since the former has an important role in the conceptualization of the self and provides the person with a sense of self-continuity.

Related to his research on the lifespan retrieval curve, which is a graph that shows the number of recollected autobiographical memories at different ages during the individual's life span, Conway (2008) also refers to a phenomenon called "the reminiscence bump" (p. 59) and defines it as "an increase in retrieval for memories from between the ages of 10 and 30" (p. 59). Conway also elucidates that the research conducted on the reminiscence bump concludes that "knowledge acquired during the period of reminiscence is highly accessible, more accessible than knowledge acquired outside this period" (p. 59). During the reminiscence bump, the older adults recollect autobiographical memories of public events and personal experiences that have occurred during adolescence and early adulthood. Being preoccupied with forming an identity, adults reflect on events from their past when they made close friends, met new people and chose their careers.

Conway (2008) further maintains that some events stick in memory for some remarkable reasons: First, the characteristics of the event itself tend to make it memorable. "Events that are personally important, consequential, unique, emotional, or surprising are liable to be better remembered" (p. 60). Second, "self-defining memories" (p. 61) which means that people's personal histories often "contain descriptions of events that were 'turning points' or self-defining moments" (p. 62). Thus, each individual has self-defining and vivid memories that comprise important knowledge regarding his/her progress towards achieving personal goals or implementing personal plans. Third, "Flashbulb memories" are "unusually vivid and detailed recollection people often have of the occasion when they first heard about some very dramatic, surprising, important, and emotionally arousing event" (p. 63). That is to say flashbulb memories concern the reception of the event or the circumstances in which the individual receives the news more than the event itself, and they are only formed if the personal event is highly important to the individual. In addition, Conway (2008) argues that experiments have proved that the accuracy of recalling autobiographical

memory might be affected if the events that the individual tries to recollect are "relatively mundane and trivial" (p. 78). He believes while recalling autobiographical memories in everyday life situations, people are free to decide whether they remember or not in order not to confuse their reminiscence with unnecessary details. Conway affirms that "highly stressful and emotional experiences leave indelible memories" (p. 78), whereas trivial or ordinary details are irretrievably lost. He also emphasizes that "memories may be altered to conform with current beliefs and attitudes, a sort of hindsight bias" (p. 78). Thus, we can understand that autobiographical memories are sometimes unstable and may be modified according to the current experiences.

With regard to the relationship between autobiographical memory and gender, Fivush (2011) explains that adult females "recount longer, more detailed, more vivid, more emotionally laden, and more relationally oriented narratives about their personal experiences than do males" (p. 569). Females are generally more emotionally oriented, and they normally think about and express emotions more deeply than males do. That is the reason why girls usually tell more detailed narratives than boys do. Thus, there are gender differences in recalling autobiographical memory as women recollect more vivid personal experiences than men, and women include more emotions, details and elaboration about the importance and meaning of their reminiscences. Studies on AMs have also proved that there are cultural differences while recalling personal memories. Fivush (2011) maintains that Western adults "tell detailed, specific, autobiographical narratives focused on their own activities, thoughts, and feelings", whereas Eastern adults "tell autobiographical narratives that are more general, less detailed, and placed in a more communal framework, considering their own actions in relation to group norms and needs" (p. 569). These differences in recalling AMs between the East and the West give a more autonomous self-directed image of self in Western cultures and a more interpersonal and communal image of self in Eastern cultures.

Thus, the previous discussion highlights that autobiographical memory is a unique human system which is culturally and socially variable and serves directive, social and self-representative functions. Autobiographical memory is a facilitator of identity development and fulfillment, and it forms a personal narrative that supports well-being and effectual functioning of the self. Creating a coherent personal narrative also facilitates emotion regulation when individuals face with negative situations as our past experiences can help us solve stressful experiences. Besides, personal narratives facilitate the creation and continuation of a social network.

3. Autobiographical Memory as a mode of survival in *Never Let Me Go*

Never Let Me Go is a novel that recounts the personal childhood and early adulthood memories of Kathy H. with her two friends Tommy and Ruth. Kathy is a 31-year-old graduate of Hailsham boarding school, and she works now as a carer. The novel is set in a fictional boarding school in Norfolk; a county in East Anglia in England, where children are reared and schooled as donors whose organs will be gradually removed for human transplantation. During this alternative history of England after the Second World War, clones were brought up in such merciless and horrible conditions just for reaping their organs after they reach adulthood. The main reason for establishing Hailsham was to demonstrate to the public that if clones were brought up in humane conditions, they could "grow to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being" (p. 239). Therefore, Hailsham encouraged its students to produce works of art, and showed them to influential people in order to prove that clones were completely human. Thanks to public opinion support, the whole industry was banned and people detested the existence of clones. Still, they considered them as an inescapable evil that could elongate their lives. Although these horrific practices are disclosed as the narrative progresses, the text itself revolves around Kathy's recollections of her love affair and friendships that sprout in Hailsham. Kathy's growing awareness of her bleak fate prompts her to cope with such an anxiety by dwelling an alternative world of her autobiographical memories.

Never Let Me Go is consisted of three parts: Part One of the novel is based on Kathy's consciously recollected personal memories of Hailsham boarding school. Part Two covers her memories at the Cottages from the age of 16 to eighteen or nineteen. Part Three tackles Kathy's present when she is 31 years old, and it also covers the final stages of Kathy's work as a carer. There are always frequent time shifts as Kathy recounts and shares her autobiographical memories around which her adult life revolves. Ishiguro creates a number of settings for his novel. The most common one in the present is Kathy's car. She is constantly on the move while driving all over the country. This act of constant moving could be read as a metaphor for her transient life. She is living in the realm of her autobiographical memories; only passing through life so as to donate her organs to save others. The journeys that Kathy makes with her car, in a reminiscent mood, act as a link between the past and the present since these journeys provide the setting and context for her recollections. Kathy says:

Driving around the country now, I still see things that will remind me of Hailsham. I might pass the corner of a misty field, or see part of a large house in the distance as I come down the side of a valley, even a particular arrangement of popular trees up on a hillside, and I'll think: "Maybe that's it! I've found it! This actually *is* Hailsham" (p. 5).

Autobiographical memories are important to Kathy, as a representative of all clones, because of the tremendously bleak situation she finds herself in. She has not chosen the future set for her; nor has she asked for her fate. She is only a slave to the destiny prepared for her before she exists, and she succumbs to being created, reared and then slaughtered for her organs. It is useless for her to regret since she can change nothing even if she has a chance to go back in time. Thus, it is not surprising for Kathy to seek this alternative world of her autobiographical recollections to live in. Kathy's personal memories of her innocent childhood at Hailsham are often happy, but when these memories link up with the present, her mood becomes sad and cheerless. Kathy says:

The earlier years—the ones I've just been telling you about—they tend to blur into each other as a kind of golden time, and when I think about them at all, even the not-so-great things, I can't help feeling a sort of glow (p. 70).

These childhood memories include Kathy's happy recollections of her more privileged rearing, than other clones in England, at Hailsham. Kathy encounters a former Hailsham student named Laura while working as a carer. When Kathy and Laura recall Hailsham, they both feel a huge relief. Even when Kathy and Laura hear about the rumours of closing Hailsham down, they feel afraid at first as Kathy feels it is "unnerving to think that things back at Hailsham are no longer carrying on just as always" (pp. 194–5). Later, they both agree that the most important fact is that Hailsham still exists in their memories:

It was that exchange, when we finally mentioned the closing of Hailsham, that suddenly brought us close again, and we hugged, quite spontaneously, not so much to comfort one another, but as a way of affirming Hailsham, the fact that it was still there in both our memories (p. 193).

Despite Kathy's constant driving around the country, she does not recognize where Hailsham is. It has been closed down as a school and its buildings are currently used for something else, and this symbolizes a loss of Kathy's childhood and innocence. The school only lives in Kathy's memory and she recalls it whenever she desires to.

This paper provides a new psychological reading of *Never Let Me Go* in the light of Autobiographical Memory Theory depending on several

grounds: first, Kathy moves from recalling what happened to recalling that this happened to her in particular, and she skillfully develops an auto-noetic consciousness. She is consciously aware of herself as the experiencer of the events in the past and the rememberer of the same events in the present; second, she cleverly links her past experiences to her present so as to show how her life story creates the self she becomes; third, Kathy creates a personal timeline of her autobiographical memories in order to construct a chronological biography for herself; fourth, Kathy's personal memories are usually merged with her own interpretations of the event with the benefit of hindsight. Still, she narrates her life story with great honesty, and when she is not completely sure of the accuracy of her remembrance, she declares obviously that "I might have some of it wrong" (p. 13), "I don't remember exactly" (p. 25), "the way I remember it" (p. 138), or "my memory of it is that ..." (p. 146); fifth, Kathy's recollection is regarding both particular occasions, such as those memories with Tommy, and general ones, such as her memories of Hailsham in general, and she always recalls her autobiographical memories from her own viewpoint; the field perspective; sixth, Kathy's reminiscence is a deliberate attempt to evade her uncomfortable psychological condition. It enables her to create a coherent self-identity and allows her to maintain social bonds with her friends. Kathy becomes alarmed on finding out the bleak future that awaits for her and the other clones and on knowing that her "life must now run the course that's been set for it" (p. 243). She admits that saying: "a part of us stayed like that: fearful of the world around us, and—no matter how much we despised ourselves for it—unable quite to let each other go" (p. 109). However, she sees abiding her cheerful autobiographical memories as the only possible way out of her dilemma. Briefly, Kathy establishes her identity through recollecting her autobiographical memories, and the first lines at the very beginning of the novel are indicative of that as she starts her autobiographical remembrance with a self-introduction:

My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That'll make it almost exactly twelve years (p. 3).

The previous lines indicate the self-representative function of autobiographical memory as Kathy starts creating her personal narrative by placing her past events in order and by revealing some of her autobiographical facts. Commenting on her own concept of identity, Kathy recalls that she learns at Hailsham "how we were different from

our guardians, from the people outside" (p. 33). The English philosopher John Locke (1995) maintains that consciousness constitutes the self and "as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person" (p. 449). In this way, Locke's theory asserts the intrinsic interrelationship between personal identity and memory, and I believe that Kathy's conscious personal memories play a significant role in constituting her sense of identity. Moreover, Cohen (2008) states that the most important characteristic of autobiographical memory is "its relationship to the self," and she clarifies that the recollected memories are "the building blocks from which the self is constructed" (p. 147). By means of these "building blocks," one can reach psychological comfort and a better self-understanding in regard to the external world. From the very beginning of the novel, it seems that Kathy's construction of her identity is based on the recollection of the memories that have marked her life. The main reason beyond that is Kathy's powerful feeling of a nostalgic longing for her past because she lacks relief in both present and future prospects. Kathy says: "I suppose, in general, I never appreciated in those days the sheer effort Ruth was making to move on, to grow up and leave Hailsham behind" (p. 119). Kathy lives in an otherworldly realm of her autobiographical memories, and that is why many questions regarding the novel's plot are left unanswered. Nobody ever knows the founder of the donation programme and who sponsors it. No one can tell why the students do not try to escape their bleak future while they are free to do whatever they like at the Cottages, or where they get money from while they are there. Nobody can justify why there is no any traffic on the roads that Kathy drives on continuously and why she is always lonely in rural areas as if England is a haunted place inhabited only by the departed souls of the clones who have been harvested for their organs. All these unanswered questions denote that human cloning is merely an ostensive theme, and that Kathy is just living in a dream-like world recalling her personal experiences that shape her life and identity.

The directive function of autobiographical memory is also very apparent in Kathy's life. Her main problem is how to cope with life in such a brutal world, but she skillfully uses her autobiographical knowledge to guide her current and future behaviour. At Hailsham, Kathy learns what the real purpose of her existence is; as Miss Lucy tells the clones "If you're to live decent lives, you have to know who you are and what lies ahead of you, every one of you" (p. 81). Kathy accepts her fate and this is so clear in her self-regulation and well-being, and she manages to create a coherent autobiographical narrative out of her personal experiences. As she grows up and reminisces about her childhood at Hailsham, Kathy realizes how

peaceful her life was, and how she was protected from the cruel world outside the boundaries of Hailsham. Matthew Beedham (2010) confirms this saying "the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro demand that readers look honestly at the past, to consider what they hold valuable, and to question how they live their lives" (p. 4). Kathy cherishes her childhood memories in the face of an atrocious world that demands her to sacrifice herself donating her organs. Her autobiographical memories work as the moving force that pushes her to go on life. She lives in her past since she has no hope in life outside the boundaries of Hailsham, and there is nothing awaiting for her outside her realm of personal memories except for death and destruction. Before being harvested for organs, the children at Hailsham are described as gifted and special by their guardians, and their ultimate murders are referred to as "completions". As one of these clones, Kathy is completely unequipped and unwelcome in mainstream society, and in truth seems as a burden to the outside world. The visit to the Cottages reflects the hostile attitudes of public toward the clones. Kathy says: "Art students, that's what she thought we were. Do you think she'd have talked to us like that if she'd known what we really were?" (p. 164). Kathy copes with the losses in her life by turning to memories of the past. She preserves the memory of Hailsham long after it has been closed, just as she preserves her memories of Tommy and Ruth long after their deaths.

The directive function of Kathy's autobiographical memory also becomes obvious when she uses her personal recollections as a guide for her actions. Her personal experiences, with all their rewards and losses, enable her to create a successful model of behaviour and struggle against the public's desire to ignore the misery of the clones. Titus Levy (2011) considers Kathy's autobiographical remembrance as a "subversive act of protest," (p. 8). He states that Kathy's wish to create a personal narrative allows her "to assert some form of autonomy in the face of a brutal regime" (p. 11). Her narration of her personal memories becomes a historical account that will remain in readers' minds as long as the novel is read. Apparently, the novel's title epitomizes this desire to hold on. The phrase "never let me go" is somewhere between a plea and a demand, reflecting a deeply human need to hold onto, and be held by, loved ones. Kathy's reminiscence is her devised technique of holding onto everyone and everything she has lost. Her true adult life starts when she begins recollecting her past memories. She says:

I won't be a carer any more come the end of the year, and though I've got a lot out of it, I have to admit I'll welcome the chance to rest—to stop and think and remember. I'm sure it's at least partly to

do with that, to do with preparing for the change of pace, that I've been getting this urge to order all these old memories (p. 37).

The social function of Kathy's autobiographical memory becomes also evident as the novel progresses. Kathy proficiently uses her personal memories as a means to socialize and interact with every possible individual she encounters in the novel. Exchanging her personal narrative and sharing her autobiographical memories with others provide her with material for conversation and thus facilitates social interaction; whether at the Cottages or wherever she goes. In other words, revealing her autobiographical memories to other individuals who are not involved in those memories enables Kathy to strengthen social bonds and generates shared sympathy and mutual understanding with others. For instance, the memories of Hailsham and its humane rearing of clones are not only valued by Kathy and the other Hailsham students. Surprisingly, they are also a source of comfort and support to non-Hailsham donors as well. Hailsham is not the only school for clones; there are other schools which are called "homes" (p. 260). However, the conditions in these homes are so terrible as Miss Emily tells Kathy that "you'd not sleep for days if you saw what still goes on in some of those places" (p. 260). This becomes apparent when Kathy becomes a carer for a donor from a "home" in Dorset and asks him about the school in which he has grown up; the donor grimaces as he rejects to be reminded. Instead, he asks Kathy to tell him about Hailsham. Kathy then realizes how lucky she, Tommy, Ruth, and all the rest have been to grow up happily in Hailsham. Apparently, this donor has no good autobiographical memories to recall and relive, and this is the reason why he asks Kathy to tell him more about Hailsham. Kathy says: "What he wanted was not just to hear about Hailsham, but to *remember* Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood" (p. 5; emphasis in the original). Robert C. Abrams (2015) indicates that "If you do not have good memories on which to reflect as you die, you must invent or borrow them" (p. 42).

Part One has plenty of autobiographical memories. Kathy's narration starts from her childhood at Hailsham, and I believe that Kathy starts her flashback at the age of thirty one because this is the period of her reminiscence bump in which she retrieves her personal memories from between the ages of 10 and 30. In her reminiscence bump, Kathy recollects public events— such as the Sale, personal experiences and autobiographical memories that have occurred to her at Hailsham, at the Cottages and in her early adulthood. This part focuses on Kathy's memories at Hailsham, and her recollections give a first impression of the place as a carefully protected bubble-like environment; an idyllic setting where the Guardians are compassionate and caring. Kathy's memories for

the events she personally experienced at Hailsham are not just a factual description of the experiences, but they include her personal emotions, thoughts and beliefs as well. I believe that Kathy's various autobiographical memories of her cheerful childhood at Hailsham, as represented in her autobiographical knowledge, make up her distinctive identity. Kathy says:

I'm a Hailsham student –which is enough by itself sometimes to get people's backs up. Kathy H., they say, she gets to pick and choose, and she always chooses her own kind: people from Hailsham, or one of the other privileged estates. No wonder she has a great record (pp. 3-4).

Kathy's mental time travel to relive her childhood experiences provides readers with specific episodes of the sort of life in Hailsham. It seems that the students enjoy plenty of activities, such as art and sport, and Kathy describes the pavilion, the pond and the rhubarb patch as very pleasant. The students seem happy since there is a scope for friendship and play. The only annoyances could be felt when Tommy gets bullied by the other boys or when Kathy gets irritated with Ruth. Apparently, students at Hailsham are deceived, and Ishiguro asserts this idea in an interview with Cynthia F. Wong in 2006. He says:

In order to have a proper childhood, an element of deception must be used... If they had known they would die in the way they do, would they have embraced this arts education? They might say, "What's the point? Why are we making all this effort?" "Would we make any effort to be decent human beings?" To make this childhood work, you have to *deceive* them into believing it's all worthwhile (p. 218; emphasis added).

Kathy sees the remembering of Hailsham as an effective way to bear her loss of her beloved friends. In her recollection of her dead friends, Ruth and Tommy, Kathy continually feels their presence near her.

Kathy's happy and carefree personal memories at Hailsham represent her only real possessions, and outside the boundaries of her autobiographical memories set at Hailsham, there is nothing awaiting for her but ultimate death. This fear from the outside world has been further reinforced by the clones' upbringing style at Hailsham where they have nearly no contact with the outside world except for exchanging a quick word with the kind men who delivers the items for the Sales. The children see the outside world beyond Hailsham as something threatening and menacing to the extent that they are even afraid to look out at the woods at night. Over time, Hailsham students have created their own horror myths about the dangers of the world outside. Kathy recalls:

The woods were at the top of the hill that rose behind Hailsham House. All we could see really was a dark fringe of trees, but I certainly wasn't the only one of my age to feel their presence day and night. When it got bad, it was like they cast a shadow over the whole of Hailsham; all you had to do was turn your head or move towards a window and there they'd be, looming in the distance (pp. 49-50).

The woods symbolize the merciless world that awaits the clones outside the boundaries of Hailsham. The atrociousness of Kathy's actual present is what actually prompts her to relive in such an alternative world of her autobiographical memories; she has no other world to survive in.

Part Two is set in the Cottages where the students stay with their needs serviced by the visiting Keffers. The possibility of escaping their inevitable death never comes to the students' minds. Obviously, the clones never think to escape their bleak future while they are at the Cottages, and Ishiguro explains that in an interview with Sean Matthews:

I suppose, ultimately, I wanted to write a book about how people accept that we are mortal and we can't get away from this, and that after a certain point we are all going to die, we won't live forever. There are various ways to rage against that, but in the end we have to accept it and there are different reactions to it. So I wanted the characters in *Never Let Me Go* to react to this horrible programme they seem to be subjected to in much the same way in which we accept the human condition, accept ageing, and falling to bits, and dying (p. 124).

The social function of autobiographical memory is so prevalent in Part Two as Kathy's sharing of her autobiographical memories with her others friends, even with Rodney and Chrissie who are non-Hailsham graduates, facilitates the formation and continuity of a social network. Despite the apparent clash between Kathy and Ruth over Tommy's love, Kathy confesses that their shared personal memories of Hailsham overcome all hardships: "We were quarrelling over all kinds of little things, but at the same time we were confiding in each other more than ever" (p. 115). Kathy develops a close relationship with friends by sharing their personal memories at Hailsham, and she recalls the atmosphere as "easygoing" and "languid" (p. 117). Memories of Hailsham have also exquisite powers in bringing together Kathy and Ruth when they meet in the recovery centre in Dover twelve years later. Kathy says:

I saw her again, at that recovery centre in Dover, all our differences—while they didn't exactly vanish—seemed not nearly as important as all the other things: like the fact that we'd grown up together at Hailsham, the fact that we knew and remembered things

no one else did. It's ever since then, I suppose, I started seeking out for my donors people from the past, and whenever I could, people from Hailsham (p. 4).

The memory of the Cottages is also directive as it preoccupies Kathy's mind in the bleakest times; before ending her work as a carer and starting her donation after the death of her two close friends. Kathy's ability to recall these personal memories in that dismal time contributes to her seeming state of effective self-functioning and psychological well-being. Happily, she remembers the trip she has made to Cromer with her friends Tommy, Ruth, Rodney and Chrissie. Together, they start their first exploration of the outside world with a trip to an exciting place on a "crisp, sunny day" (p. 146). Delighted memories then come to Kathy's mind as she remembers the apparent naivety and happiness of her friends on their first sight of the surroundings of the Cottages. For instance, they have been much preoccupied with the idea of finding their "possible"; namely the people they are cloned from. Kathy says: "when you were out there yourself—in the towns, shopping centres, transport cafés—you kept an eye out for 'possibles'—the people who might have been the models for you and your friends" (p. 127).

Some particular autobiographical memories stick in Kathy's mind because they are personally important and emotional, or they are, in other times, self-defining memories. These vivid memories, or as previously called "Flashbulb memories" (Conway, 2008) are emotionally arousing events or mementoes of these events in Kathy's life. During her days at the Cottages, Kathy remembers her collection box which she used to store keepsakes at Hailsham in her childhood. Kathy cherishes this collection box because she is well aware of the emotional support she can gain from such a memory. Many years later at the medical centre, Ruth confesses to Kathy that she wishes she had cherished her collections too. In addition, Kathy treasures three cassette tapes that are very significant keepsakes for her. The first of them is the album called "*Songs After Dark*" (p. 66) that Kathy finds at the "Sale". Unfortunately Kathy loses this tape later and she becomes so distressed. The second of the three tapes that Kathy treasures is a gift from Ruth after Kathy loses the first cassette tape. Ruth gives Kathy an orchestra music tape called "*Twenty Classic Dance Tunes*" to cheer her up (p. 75). Although Ruth's tape is so different from the one that Kathy loses, Kathy greatly appreciates Ruth's thoughtfulness. Kathy recollects this memory with Ruth saying: "I felt the disappointment ebbing away and being replaced by a real happiness... I squeezed one of her hands in both mine when I thanked her... Ruth has gone, it's become one of my most precious possessions" (p. 75). Kathy cherishes Ruth's

tape because she values the memory of Ruth associated with the tape; the cassette tape is simply a precious memory of the happy childhood she has spent with Ruth.

The third tape that Kathy treasures has been found by Kathy and Tommy while they explore around Norfolk. Hailsham students believe that Norfolk is England's "lost corner" (p. 65) where the lost property is kept. That is why Kathy and Tommy search for the lost cassette tape there. Kathy recalls this enjoyable memory with Tommy, her best and beloved friend, in Norfolk saying:

I had to really hold myself back from giggling stupidly, or jumping up and down on the pavement like a little kid... That moment when we decided to go searching for my lost tape, it was like suddenly every cloud had blown away, and we had nothing but fun and laughter before us (p. 169).

When they find the lost cassette tape, Kathy pretends not to see it since she desires this lovely trip with Tommy to last longer. Kathy says "I was still feeling a pang of regret that we'd found it so quickly" (p. 171). Kathy cherishes the third tape because it reminds her of the wonderful time she spends with Tommy at the Cottages. Kathy explains:

I really appreciated having the tape –and that song –back again. Even then, it was mainly a nostalgia thing, and today, if I happen to get the tape out and look at it, it brings back memories of that afternoon in Norfolk every bit as much as it does our Hailsham days (p. 171).

By portraying Kathy's treasuring of these tapes, Ishiguro is trying to here pinpoint the importance of emotionally arousing autobiographical memories in one's life. The three cassette tapes signify Kathy's emotional personal memories: the first cassette tape reminds her of her innocent childhood at Hailsham, the second tape is a memento of best friend Ruth and the third tape is a reminder of Kathy's sweet memories with the love of her life; Tommy. These three tapes and the autobiographical remembering associated with them have a functional role in Kathy's stress-management and emotion regulation during the bleakest time after her friends' deaths. Gradually, Kathy begins to feel that there is no real purpose in life at the Cottages since she has nothing to do except for domestic chores. Kathy narrates: "We certainly didn't think much about our lives beyond the Cottages, or about who ran them, or how they fitted into the larger world" (p. 114). Eventually, Kathy decides to start training as a carer, and since then, she has no contact with Ruth and Tommy for a long period of time.

Part Three depicts a mature picture of Kathy who is now 31 years old after working as a carer for twelve years: "For the most part being a carer

sued me just fine" Kathy says disingenuously (p. 204). As an emotionally oriented female, Kathy recounts longer and more detailed personal narratives about her personal experiences. However, her autobiographical knowledge denotes self-delusion when she pretends to be generally happy with her life at the age of thirty one. She repeatedly assures herself that she is happy to retire from being a carer and starting the process of donation. She says: "Once I have a quieter life, in whichever centre they send me to" (p. 281). She knows well that clones are reared to be harvested for their organs, and death is the real completion of their tasks after organ removal surgeries. Mark Currie comments on Kathy's self-delusion saying:

For Kathy, to stop being a 'carer' means to start her 'donations', or in a less euphemistic language, to die a premature death. The very persistence of this euphemistic language supports the supposition that the truth of what happens for Kathy at the end of the year is not being honestly apprehended, and that the horror of realization is averted in cheerful optimism (p. 100).

Kathy's implicit fear of her looming death after completing her donations brings about the worst memories of grief and anguish. The real atrocious world, in which clones have no hope of survival, casts its shadows on Kathy's autobiographical remembrance once she decides to start her donations; this is demonstrated when she starts recollecting two heartbreaking personal memories: first, her memory of the temper tantrums that used to happen to Tommy since their childhood. Near the end of the novel, Kathy and Tommy go to Madame to ask for a deferral for completing donations since they are genuinely in love, but they leave in great disappointment when they are told that deferral is impossible. While they are on their way back, Tommy gets out of the car and starts "raging, shouting, flinging his fists and kicking out" (p. 269). His emotional outburst is the natural consequence of his frustrated hope, and only then, Kathy reaches a deeper understanding of his tantrums:

'I was thinking,' I said, 'about back then, at Hailsham, when you used to go bonkers like that, and we couldn't understand it. We couldn't understand how you could ever get like that ... I was thinking maybe the reason you used to get like that was because at some level you always *knew*' (p. 270).

Tommy then confesses and says: "Maybe I did know, somewhere deep down. Something the rest of you didn't" (p. 270). The memory is very emotional and Kathy recalls it saying:

And so we stood together like that, at the top of that field for what seemed like ages, not saying anything, just holding each other,

while the wind kept blowing and blowing at us, tugging our clothes, and for a moment, it seemed like we were holding onto each other because that was the only way to stop us from being swept away into the night (p. 274).

Second, Kathy's repeated remembering of the barbed wire, which Kathy, Tommy and Ruth have to get past in order to reach the abandoned boat (p. 218) and which is between Kathy and the field in the final scene (p. 281), is a personal memory that foreshadows her looming death. Despite the trio's apparent happiness and innocence in the abandon boat memory, the barbed wire, symbol of constraint and pain, symbolizes the trio's suppressed feelings that are hindered by a painful barrier from reaching somewhere free and open. The abandoned boat itself symbolizes the gloomy future of death that that awaits each of the trio. The boat can no longer sail away freely and it is stuck and wrecked symbolizing the clones who are prisoners of the donation programme with no freedom and no choices. These two heartbreaking personal memories, together with her looming death, compel Kathy's insistence on sticking to her cheerful autobiographical memories as an alternative world to live in. By recalling her autobiographical memories, Kathy is also involved in a life registering project that records memories of her deceased beloved friends by including them into her own memoir. Kathy says at the end of the novel:

I was talking to one of my donors a few days ago who was complaining about how memories, even your most precious ones, fade surprisingly quickly. But I don't go along with that. The memories I value most, I don't see them ever fading. I lost Ruth, then I lost Tommy, but I won't lose my memories of them (p. 280).

Completely accepting her eventual fate as an organ donor, Kathy understands that the only way to cope with her frustrated life is to live in, narrate and recollect her autobiographical memories which can keep her body intact until a definite time.

Kathy's recollection is thus a symbolic field where traces of lost lives still exist. She says at the end of the novel: "I'm glad that's the way it'll be. It's like with my memories of Tommy and of Ruth ... I'll have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that'll be something no one can take away" (p. 281). She finally decides to live the remainder of her short life reliving her blissful autobiographical memories. Her reminiscences, her return to the past and her longing for a peaceful memory indicate how she skillfully manipulates her personal memories to create an alternative pleasant world rather than her real dystopian and brutal one. She also uses her personal memories as a tool for recognizing herself, maintaining

social bonds with her friends and coping with the merciless world surrounding her.

5. Conclusion

Autobiographical memory is a unique form of human memory that is concerned with people's ability to recollect their lives. Memory is an important theme in Ishiguro's fiction, and I believe that Ishiguro's *Never let me go* is a literary manifesto that extends and elaborates the argument regarding the importance of autobiographical memories in people's lives. In the case of Kathy, the conducted textual analysis highlighted that recalling her autobiographical memories had three main functions; directive, social and self definitional. First, through reliving her past and her autobiographical world, Kathy could find solace in and cope with her merciless brutal world. Her capacity to recall her personal memories provided her with an alternative world in which she overcame feelings of hopelessness and set her future goal; to make and complete her donation such as her friends. Second, it was only through sharing her personal memories with others that Kathy managed to increase closeness and intimacy with Tommy, Ruth and the rest. Kathy uses her personal memories as material for social bonding with Tommy, Ruth and everybody she encountered in the novel. Third, Kathy's life story was a significant component of who she was, and her sense of self evolved greatly by linking together and interpreting her personal experiences.

Kathy's calmness and serene attitude toward her inevitable death indicates how recalling autobiographical memories is related to well-being and self-regulation. Kathy had no future, no life except in this alternative world of her autobiographical memories. She faced premature death by recollecting her precious personal memories, and she did not resist since she already had a satisfactory bulk of happy memories. Her amazingly retentive memory allowed her to escape the brutal reality and submerge herself in nostalgia for her past. Even if she lost her organs as she was destined to, she believed that no power on earth can deprive her of her precious childhood memories of her friends and Hailsham. Kathy simply adopted autobiographical remembrance as a way to survive and manipulated her personal memories to assuage her fears from her bleak future. Her autobiographical reminiscence was thus a reaction to her trauma and alleviated her horror, guided her, reinforced her sense of self and aided her to socialize.

References

- Abrams, R. C. (2015). Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go: A model of 'completion' for the end of life. *Medical Humanities*, 42(1), 42-45. doi:10.1136/medhum-2015-010767
- Beedham, M., & Tredell, N. (2010). *The novels of Kazuo Ishiguro*. Basingstoke (Hampshire): Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bluck S, AleaN. 2002. Exploring the functions of autobiographical memory. In *Critical Advances in Reminiscence Work: From Theory to Application*, ed. JD Webster, BK Haight, (pp. 61–75). New York: Springer
- Conway, M. A. & Cohen, G. (2008). *Memory in the Real World*. East Sussex, U. K.: Psychology Press.
- Conway, M. A., & Rubin, D. C. (1993). The structure of autobiographical memory. In C. F. Alan, S. E. Gathercole, M. A. Conway, & P. E. Morris (Eds.), *Theories of memory* (pp. 103-137). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Currie, M. (2010). Controlling Time: Never Let Me Go. In S. Matthews & S. Groes (Eds.), *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (pp. 91-103). London: Continuum.
- Fivush, R. (2011). The Development of Autobiographical Memory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 62, 559-582. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.121208.131702
- Ishiguro, K. (2000, September). Author Q & A: A Conversation with Kazuo Ishiguro about his New Novel When We Were Orphans [Interview by Knopf Publicity]. Retrieved March 20, 2019, from <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/85614/when-we-were-orphans-by-kazuo-ishiguro/9780375724404>
- Ishiguro, K. (2006). *Never let me go*. London: Faber.
- Ishiguro, K. (2017). The Nobel Prize in Literature 2017. Retrieved August 15, 2018, from <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2017/ishiguro/lecture/>
- Levy, T. (2011). Human Rights Storytelling and Trauma Narrative in Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go. *Journal of Human Rights*, 10(1), 1-16. doi:10.1080/14754835.2011.546242
- Locke, J. (1995). *An essay concerning human understanding*. New York, NY: Dover Publications.
- Matsumoto, D. (2009). *Cambridge dictionary of psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Matthews, S. (2010). I'm Sorry I Can't Say More: An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro. In S. Matthews & S. Groes (Eds.), *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (pp. 114-125). London: Continuum.
- Mcadams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(2), 100-122. doi:10.1037//1089-2680.5.2.100
- Mullan, J. (2010). On First Reading Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go. In S. Matthews & S. Groes (Eds.), *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (pp. 104-113). London: Continuum.

Nelson, K. (1993). The Psychological and Social Origins of Autobiographical Memory. *Psychological Science*, 4(1), 7-14. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.1993.tb005

48.x

Radstone, S. (2000). *Memory and methodology*. Oxford: Berg.

Shaffer, B. W., & Wong, C. F. (2008). *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Tulving, E. (2002). Episodic Memory: From Mind to Brain. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53(1), 1-25. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.53.100901.135114