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RECREATING THE PAST AND IDENTITY AS STORIES IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *NEVER LET ME GO*

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Abstract: *This essay analyzes Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go and shows that the past and the characters' identities are recreated as stories in a postmodernist style. It points out that the characters rely on their memories to reconstruct their past, giving it their own interpretation and turning it into a story. Kathy, the narrator of the novel, and her interlocutors can understand their past by reflecting on their memories and drawing their conclusions in their stories. The way they interpret their past and its symbols in their subjective accounts offers suggestions about their identity which is also their story.*

Key words: *clone, identity, memories, the past, reconstruction, story*

1. Introduction

Applying the theories put forward by Linda Hutcheon (1988, 2002) who shows that postmodernist novels demonstrate the idea that the past can be understood only by analyzing its "textual traces" (Hutcheon 2002:75) and that "we are epistemologically limited in our ability to know that past, since we are both spectators of and actors in the historical process" (Hutcheon 1988:122) and focusing on the idea developed by Mark Currie (1998) who argues that the way we represent ourselves and the world in our story shapes our identity, this essay will point out that in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *Never Let Me Go*, the past and the characters' identities are reconstructed through the stories that the narrator and her interlocutors recount from their subjective perspective in a postmodernist style. This essay expounds the idea that Kazuo Ishiguro's novel offers a representation of what Brian McHale (2004:85) calls "transworld identities" in search of their origin and essence, looking into their past to make sense of it and understand their condition as human clones.

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is a postmodernist novel and an instance of what Patricia Waugh (2003) calls "metafiction" as it approaches "the metaphor of the world as book" (Waugh 2003:3), introducing us to the narrator's vision of it. It is first person narrative divided into three parts, including twenty-three chapters. The narrator is Kathy H, a thirty-one-year-old carer, who tells us the story of her life and her past, inviting our interpretation of her open-ended chapters. Part I focuses on her life at Hailsham. Part II presents us with details about her life at the Cottages. Part III introduces us to her life as a carer. Each part of the novel focuses on Kathy's search for the truth regarding her past and identity. She evokes memories from her childhood, outlining her personal views and telling us her story. She recalls her conversations with her old friends from Hailsham on what happened to them in the past and suggests that the truth of the past can be known through their analysis and interpretation of it in their stories. All of the characters in this novel are human clones created as part of a project to help medical science to progress, having to donate their vital organs at a certain moment and die. They live a life of prisoners educated in the Hailsham centre and are supervised by their guardians, who teach them various courses. Having been created as human clones, they are not told the sad

truth about their identity as their guardians refrain from telling them detailed information about this aspect.

Nevertheless, they start searching for this truth, reviving their memories of the past, sharing their stories and their personal views on them. They stand for what Linda Hutcheon (1988) calls “the ex-centric, the off-center” that “ineluctably identifies with the center it desires but is denied” (Hutcheon 1988:60). In line with Linda Hutcheon’s theory, in this novel, the “margins and edges gain new value” and “that which is ‘different’ is valorized in opposition both to élitist, alienated ‘otherness’ and also to the uniformizing impulse of mass culture” (Hutcheon 1988:130). Thus, throughout the novel, we are shown that the characters long for a normal life outside Hailsham where they can procreate and be happy. Unfortunately, they have to give up their hope of living a normal adult life, accepting their limited condition of human clones as no other option is offered to them. The normal world they long for can be associated with what Linda Hutcheon (1988) calls “the alienated ‘otherness’ ” (Hutcheon 1988:130), which is marked by selfishness, coldness, lack of sympathy, and morality.

2. The Past as a Story

Illustrating the theory presented by Brian McHale (2004) who defines “the postmodernist condition” as “an anarchic landscape of worlds in the plural” (McHale 2004:37), Kathy H., the narrator of the novel, *Never Let Me Go*, attempts to recreate and understand her past by exploring the world of Hailsham where she spent her childhood and had school education during her adolescence, the world of the Cottages where she learned how to drive and make decisions on her own, the world of the medical centres where she used to be a carer, making comparisons between these worlds and alluding to the differences between them and an everyday world she would like to live in. A cyclical novel which starts by focusing on the image of Kathy H. presented as a carer at thirty-one years old, who does her job well and tries to reconstruct the lost Hailsham in her imagination, and which ends by depicting her image of a carer who has lost all her beloved ones but her memories of the past, *Never Let Me Go* invites its readers to make sense of the past based on the stories told by Kathy and her interlocutors. In Part I, Kathy offers us a complete description of Hailsham, a centre where she used to live and study in her early adolescence and which no longer exists, remembering its location while driving and telling us details about its rooms, its pavilion, and playground. She frequently repeats the verbs *see* and *think*, suggesting that her description of Hailsham is limited to her memories and subjective vision. She tries to recognize the pattern of the past in the present:

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 poplar trees up on a hillside, and I’ll think: ‘Maybe that’s it! I’ve found it. This actually is Hailsham!’ Then I see it’s impossible and I go on driving, my thoughts drifting on elsewhere. In particular, there are those pavilions. [...] Not long ago I was driving through an empty stretch of Worcestershire and saw one beside a cricket ground so like ours at Hailsham I actually turned the car and went back for a second look (Ishiguro 2005:5-6).

By frequently using the verbs *think* and *see*, which enable her to express her personal opinions on the past, Kathy H. demonstrates the idea formulated by Linda Hutcheon (2002) who explains that what we read in a postmodernist fiction is a recreation of the past in a subjective manner through one’s vision and stories and not an objective presentation of the past. As Linda Hutcheon (2002) remarks, “knowing the past becomes a question of representing, that is, of constructing and interpreting, not of objective recording” (Hutcheon 2002:70). In her detailed story, Kathy recreates the world of Hailsham, the symbol of her past, and explores it by getting into minute details that bring it to life. Unveiled as an overwhelming, visible presence, Hailsham, an educational centre created for scientific purposes meant to test the

possibility to save the world outside it with the vital organs donated by the human clones grown up and educated here, can be associated with a foregone artificially-created world within the normal world whose inhabitants have total freedom to choose what to do with their life and bodies, being free and able to procreate. The Hailsham centre is divided into dorms where groups of fifteen clone children used to sleep and rooms with symbolic names for certain purposes. Thus, the rooms where they have classes are numbered, whereas the other rooms are attached to a certain symbol. The billiards room stands for an exhibition room where the children's selected works are displayed on tables. The name of this room is reminiscent of the game of billiards that welcomes one's chance to succeed based on patience, experience, a lot of exercise, and personal experiments. This game may invite the players to try to carry out a personal experiment to enable them to win, just as the Hailsham students' life implies trying to cope with the experiment they have been created for. One can notice a similarity between what this game requires for success and what the Hailsham students' life requires for successfully achieving its purpose: general education, personal creativity, patience, and an effort to meet certain requirements.

The significant events of the past are presented in minute detail. Thus, we are shown that at the Hailsham centre, the students' human contact with the outside world is done through *the Sales* and *the Exchanges*, symbolic events standing for the marketplace and the business environment nowadays. These events offer the children the possibility to exchange their pieces of work and, at the same time, to appreciate their value based on comparisons with other people's work and products exhibited here:

Looking back now, it's funny to think we got so worked up, because usually the Sales were a big disappointment. There'd be nothing remotely special and we'd spend our tokens just renewing stuff that was wearing out or broken with more of the same. But the point was, I suppose, we'd all of us in the past found something at a Sale, something that had become special: a jacket, a watch, a pair of craft scissors never used but kept proudly next to a bed. [...] The Sales were a complete contrast to the hushed atmosphere of the Exchanges. They were held in the Dining Hall, and were crowded and noisy. In fact the pushing and shouting was all part of the fun, and they stayed for the most part pretty good-humoured. Except, as I say, every now and then, things would get out of hand, with students grabbing and tugging, sometimes fighting (Ishiguro 2005:38-39).

The documentary evidence of what they buy at the *Sales* is given by *the registers* – the symbol of a concrete proof of what happened in the past that can contribute to understanding its truth: “Unfortunately for Ruth, though, there were registers kept of everything bought at the Sales, along with a record of who'd done the buying” (Ishiguro 2005:54). Being suggested that we can understand the past by analyzing its written evidence, we can remark that Kazuo Ishiguro's novel demonstrates the idea enlarged upon by Linda Hutcheon (2002) who shows that “this is the paradox of postmodernism. The past really did exist, but we can only know it today through its textual traces, its often complex and indirect representations in the present: documents, archives [...]” (Hutcheon 2002:75).

The process of making sense of the past requires Kathy, the narrator of this novel, to organize her memories into stories of the events and people that marked her life at Hailsham. Thus, she tells us the story of her relationship with Tommy, her colleague from Hailsham, who is a world apart as he finds it difficult to be creative and offer pieces of personal work to Madame's Gallery. He behaves like a free, normal child with a dynamic and strong personality. He becomes attached to Kathy and confides in her. We are introduced to their secret meeting at the pond and revealed details about his discussion with Miss Lucy, one of their guardians, who is sympathetic and approaches him with care, love, and respect, not punishing him for his failure to be creative. In his conversation with Kathy, Tommy tries to figure out what Miss Lucy suggested by saying that they “weren't being taught enough” (Ishiguro 2005:27). Kathy tries to

answer some questions about her past by putting together the pieces of information Tommy has offered her. She would like to clarify why Miss Lucy suggested that they should know more about their world and obligations to donate their human organs, and why Madame used to take away their pictures and personal work for the Gallery. She would like to decipher a haunting, mysterious past, recalling many conversations and stories, getting into details, and sharing her perspective on them.

Putting her memories together to reconstruct the world of the Hailsham centre with its specific rules, values, and events, Kathy circulates the story of the Gallery, which is a collection of artefacts taken by Madame, one of the guardians, from the Hailsham students. The Gallery stands for the lost historical evidence of the past that is reconstructed through stories and is open to the readers' interpretations. It is associated with a "hazy realm" (Ishiguro 2005:29) that is difficult to make sense of. Talking about it at Hailsham is considered a mistake. Kathy proves this idea by telling us the story of the incident taking place in Room 7 at their age of eleven years when Carole H. tells Mr. Roger, one of their guardians, that he could collect a certain thing for the Gallery. According to this story, Carole H. was treated as if she had made a mistake by simply making reference to the Gallery, which shows that the Hailsham students were not encouraged to enjoy and exercise the freedom of speech and thinking. The cultural past, associated with the symbol of the Gallery, is turned into a story that is circulated by Kathy and her interlocutors who bring back their memories and give it their own interpretation: "I'd suppose now it was something passed down through the different generations of Hailsham students" (Ishiguro 2005:28).

Kathy's nostalgia for the past arouses her feelings of sadness for losing her own pieces of work given to Madame's Gallery. These feelings also generate what Kathy calls "the tokens controversy" (Ishiguro 2005:35), the Hailsham students being happy for having their work selected for the Gallery and at the same time feeling unhappy for losing their work forever. They are urged to donate what they create without being offered anything to compensate for their effort, the same as they are required to donate their vital organs, having been created for this specific purpose. Not only do they regretfully remember their pieces of work given to the Gallery, but they also wistfully think about their wooden chests, Ruth's pencil case, and Kathy's favourite tape, which are symbols of the past the narrator feels attached to. All of these objects have been taken away from them and are recollected with a feeling of sadness and regret.

Not only is the past remembered with wistful nostalgia in Kathy's stories about their lost pieces of work and presents, but it is also emotionally interpreted by this narrator in her detailed accounts. Thus, when Kathy tells Tommy the story of her encounter with Madame when she was listening to her favourite song, 'Never Let Me Go', on the album, 'Songs after Dark' by Judy Bridgewater, she reveals to us the way she decodes the message of this song and the reasons why she liked it so much. Kathy explains that while listening to this song, she had a vision of a woman who came to have a baby by a miracle despite having been made to believe that this dream of giving birth could never come true for her. In Kathy's vision, the woman sings this song and implores her child never to abandon her, being afraid that she might lose him if an unexpected, dangerous event took place:

What was so special about this song? Well, the thing was, I didn't used to listen properly to the words; I just waited for that bit that went: 'Baby, baby, never let me go...' And what I'd imagine was a woman who'd been told she couldn't have babies, who'd really, really wanted them all her life. Then there's a sort of miracle and she has a baby, and she holds this baby very close to her and walks around singing: 'Baby, never let me go...' partly because she's so happy, but also because she's so afraid something will happen, that the baby will get ill or be taken away from her. Even at the time, I realised this couldn't be right, that this interpretation didn't fit with the rest of the lyrics. But that wasn't an issue with me. The song was about what I said, and I used to listen to it again and again, on my own, whenever I got the chance (Ishiguro 2005:64).

She makes a connection between her vision on the message of this song and Madame's emotional reaction of crying at her sight. We are suggested that the guardian, Madame, remarked the similitude between the message of the song and Kathy's desperate desire to never be left alone in this world. Admitting that her interpretation of this song is correct – "The song was about what I said" (Ishiguro 2005:64) – Kathy turns it into a story. At this point, we can remark the use of the narrative strategy of story within a story, which is a "framing device" (Waugh 2003:30) specific to metafiction. It reflects the general theme of this novel, that is, one's desire to live a happy, normal life, procreating and never being left alone in the world and forced to donate one's vital organs and die. The narrator of this novel, Kathy H., looks into her past life with hope that there will be open doors to happiness, enabling her to escape death caused by the donation of vital organs. Thus, this song, which is a story within a story, alludes to the hope and desire the clone children from Hailsham have for survival, happiness, and love. The way Kathy interprets this song as if it were a story evinces her emotional intelligence and storytelling skills that contribute to reshaping her identity. Madame's reaction of crying when hearing the song and watching Kathy is her emotional response to Kathy's hope of never being abandoned and left to die as part of the clone project that forces its participants to donate their vital organs and put an end to their lives. Focusing on this scene and longing for the tape that mysteriously disappeared evokes Kathy's nostalgia for a past that can bring hope in the present.

The events of the past, its symbols, and truth are also enlarged upon in Ruth's stories. According to Kathy, Ruth's stories offer questionable evidence about the past. Kathy is doubtful about Ruth's claim that the pencil case Midge A. asked her about is a gift from Miss Geraldine or not. Just like Kathy's tape, Ruth's favourite pencil case has disappeared, giving rise to various interpretations regarding its owner and donor: "So what if she'd fibbed a little about her pencil case? Didn't we all dream from time to time about one guardian or other bending the rules and doing something special for us? A spontaneous hug, a secret letter, a gift? All Ruth had done was to take one of these harmless daydreams a step further; she hadn't even mentioned Miss Geraldine by name" (Ishiguro 2005:55). One can draw the conclusion that Ruth might have turned her dream of having this pencil case into a story open to interpretations. Kathy expects Ruth to offer more explanations that can clarify the events of the past at Hailsham based on her personal knowledge and memories. As the narrator remarks, Ruth's power lies in her knowledge and information, being able to offer details about her friends' plot to kidnap Miss Geraldine, one of their guardians:

"She had known about the plot for much longer than the rest of us, and this gave her enormous authority; by hinting that the real evidence came from a time before people like me had joined – that there were things she's yet to reveal even to us – she could justify almost any decision she made on behalf of the group" (Ishiguro 2005:47-48).

The idea that the truth of the past is a story is illustrated by the embedded stories about the woods: "The guardians always insisted these stories were nonsense. But then the older students would tell us exactly what the guardians had told them when they were younger, and that we'd be told the ghastly truth soon enough, just as they were" (Ishiguro 2005:46). These stories survive in time and are open to many interpretations. They are part of an eternal present compared to "a golden time" (Ishiguro 2005:70) that includes Kathy's conversations with Tommy and the stories circulated by him:

I want to move on now to our last years at Hailsham. [...] In my memory my life at Hailsham falls into two distinct chunks: this last era, and everything that came before. The earlier years – the one's 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. [...] That talk with Tommy beside the pond: I think of it now as a kind of marker between the two eras (Ishiguro 2005:70).

The repetition of the verb *think* shows that Kathy's presentation of the events of the past is a subjective story. Her discussions with Tommy seem to broaden her perspective on the past. Thus, Kathy comes to appreciate Miss Lucy as "the most likely source of important clues" (Ishiguro 2005:70) about the past. She recalls Miss Lucy's comments on a conversation between Gordon and Peter J., who, together with other clone children from Hailsham, take shelter from a downpour in a pavilion. Gordon and Peter J. wondered what their life would be like if they became actors and said that they would go to America. As Kathy points out, Miss Lucy overhears this conversation and tells the students the painful truth about their condition as human clones, which implies living to become donors of vital organs. Miss Lucy forecasts a not-too-distant, grim future for them without any happiness or hope:

'If no one else will talk to you', she continued 'then I will. The problem as I see it, is that you've been told and not told. You've been told but none of you really understand, and I dare say, some people are quite happy to leave it that way. But I'm not. If you're going to have decent lives, then you've got to know and know properly. None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day. Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do. You're not like the actors you watch on your videos, you're not even like me. You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided. So you're not to talk that way any more. You'll be leaving Hailsham before long, and it's not far off, the day you'll be preparing for your first donations. You'll need to remember that. If you're to have decent lives, you have to know who you are and what lies ahead of you, every one of you' (Ishiguro 2005:73-74).

As the narrator points out, Miss Lucy's speech on the clone children's destiny seems to continue silently in her mind, which they can read and understand. According to Kathy, Miss Lucy could have offered them more information. Thus, Kathy suggests that they have been told just a part of the truth that could shed light on their past and identity, having to discover more details based on other discussions, observations, and stories.

Kathy's stories focus on a chronological past. Thus, after presenting us details about her life and school activities at Hailsham, about her relationships with her colleagues and guardians from Hailsham, she enlarges upon her experiences at the Cottages where her perspective upon the world changes. As her story goes, it is at the Cottages where she learns how to drive and where she starts making decisions by herself. Her description of the Cottages creates a comprehensive picture of the past: "The Cottages were the remains of a farm that had gone out of business years before. There was an old farmhouse, and around it barns, outhouses, stables, all converted for us to live in" (Ishiguro 2005:106). The repetition of the verb *think* when she introduces us to her vision on the Cottages suggests that we read her subjective opinions on the past and not an objective account of it:

It's funny now recalling the way it was at the beginning, because when I think of those two years at the Cottages today, I think of easy-going days drifting in and out of each other's rooms [...] I think of my pile of old paperbooks, their pages gone wobbly, like they'd once belonged to the sea. I think about how I read them, lying on my front in the grass on warm afternoons [...]. I think about the mornings waking up in my room at the top of the Black Barn to the voices of students outside in the field, arguing about poetry or philosophy [...] (Ishiguro 2005:109).

The narrator's attempt to discover and understand the truth of the past by focusing on her memories is followed by her desire to have been able to reconstruct it, wishing she could have approached a different subject in her essay, which she was supposed to write as part of an assignment all children at Hailsham had. She subtly implies that she would have liked to focus on her dreams in this essay instead of approaching the Victorian novels in it. In Part II, chapter 10, Kathy ponders on this essay, which is nothing but her book of life she would like to rewrite: "the one I was supposed to be writing back then, when we were at the Cottages. [...] Once we got to the Cottages, though, the essays took on a new importance. In our first days there, and for some of us a lot longer, it was like we were clinging to our essay, this last task from Hailsham, like it was a farewell gift from the guardians" (Ishiguro 2005:105). Considering this essay to be "a farewell gift from the guardians" (Ishiguro 2005:105), Kathy suggests that she is offered the freedom to speak her mind in her own writing on a chosen topic.

Her essay is left unfinished and open to being filled in with other ideas and conclusions. It looks like the book of Kathy's desired life associated with a free and normal adult life, having the ability to procreate and to live in a happy community that never abandons her: "When I think about my essay today, what I do is go over it in some detail: I may think of a completely new approach I could have taken, or about different writers and books I could have focused on. [...] Just lately, I've even toyed with the idea of going back and working on it, once I'm not a carer any more and I've got the time" (Ishiguro 2005:105). Approaching the theme of the world compared to a book, Kazuo Ishiguro's novel can be considered metafictional as Patricia Waugh (2003) explains that this theme is specific to metafiction. Despite the chosen topic for this essay, Kathy would like to focus on her desired life and future in this writing, implying that her approach is subjective and open to various analyses and conclusions. She admits that her essay does not tell us the truth of the past but just her dream perspective on how things could have been. The truth of the past is just a story: "I think about the essay the same way I might a rounders match at Hailsham I did particularly well in, or else an argument from long ago where I can now think of all the clever things I should have said. It's at that sort of level – daydream stuff" (Ishiguro 2005:105-106). Kathy and her colleagues from the Hailsham centre would like to rewrite the past by reflecting on their own memories in their own stories. To narrate them, they make a big effort to collect evidence about their past, discovering and asserting their identity created for medical and scientific purposes. The truth of their past and identity lies in Kathy's analysis and interpretation of her memories, which require further clarification.

3. Identity as a story

Attempting to discover and acknowledge the truth about her past and identity by focusing on her personal memories of her past, Kathy H., the narrator of this novel, tries to collect more information about her condition as a human clone, using and explaining various theories and stories. She is an instance of what Brian McHale (2004:85) calls "transworld identity" in search of her origin and true mission in this world, looking into her past to make sense of it. Thus, she sets out to define and disclose the Hailsham students' identity based on the stories told by their guardians at Hailsham, Miss Lucy, Miss Emily, and Madame, and through her own research and analysis. At this point, she illustrates the theory advanced by Mark Currie (1998), who shows that in postmodernist fiction, one's identity is exposed and understood through one's story. Her interactions with her friends from Hailsham and their discussions about their past, present, and future lives evince their emotional intelligence, intuition, and creativity, which shape their identity. The way Kathy H. narrates her story and her interlocutors' stories offers a glimpse of her personality, part of her identity. She would like to find the truth about her identity as a clone and starts checking the theory of "the possibles" (Ishiguro 2005:127) associated with the original identity the Hailsham children are claimed to

have copied when they were created artificially for scientific purposes. She introduces us to this theory and her friends' vision on it:

The basic idea behind the possibles theory was simple, and didn't provoke much dispute. It went something like this. Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life. This meant, at least in theory, you'd be able to find the person you were modelled from (Ishiguro 2005:127).

We are presented diverse viewpoints on the concept of the "possible" (Ishiguro 2005:127), which is the original source their created identity might represent. According to Kathy's friends, finding this original source of their identity enables them to understand who they really are and to know how they will evolve in the future:

Now I don't mean anyone really thought that if your model turned out to be, say, a guy working at a railway station, that's what you'd end up doing too. We all realised it wasn't that simple. Nevertheless, we all of us, to varying degrees, believed that when you saw the person you were copied from, you'd get some insight into who you were deep down, and maybe too, you'd see something of what your life held in store (Ishiguro 2005: 127).

There were some who thought it stupid to be concerned about possibles at all. Our models were an irrelevance, a technical necessity for bringing us into the world, nothing more than that. It was up to each of us to make of our lives what we could (Ishiguro 2005:127-128).

To shed light on the source of their identity as clones, Kathy focuses on Ruth's story about Chrissie and Rodney, who claim to have found the source of Ruth's identity. Thus, in chapter twelve, we can read a conversation in which Ruth informs Kathy about Chrissie and Rodney's trip to Cromer, a town in the northern part of the Norfolk coast, where they pretend to have seen Ruth's "possible" (Ishiguro 2005:127) or the original model she reflects. According to Ruth's story, Rodney has seen it at a desk in an office "with a large glass front" (Ishiguro 2005:128). Kathy can hardly believe this story and thinks that Ruth has invented everything. Nevertheless, she decides to check this aspect and goes on a trip to Norfolk with Ruth, Tommy, Rodney, and Chrissie to see what Rodney claims is the source of Ruth's identity, a woman working in an office in Cromer on the Norfolk coast. They leave early in the morning in a Rover car borrowed by Rodney, spend their time in a relaxing manner, go to a café near the sea on a cliff edge in Norfolk, having sandwiches and listening to Rodney's story about his old friend, Martin, who lives in Cromer, a town by the sea in Norfolk, where he is a carer. Rodney takes them to an office near the High Street, where he shows them what he considers to be Ruth's source of identity. They can see it through the window of the office: "'Okay, Rod,' Chrissie said. 'So which one's the possible?' [...]. But Rodney said quietly, with a tremor of excitement: 'There. Over in that corner, in the blue outfit. Her, talking now to the big red woman'" (Ishiguro 2005:145). They scrutinize her look, clothes, and behaviour carefully and, based on her personal analysis, Kathy concludes that the person associated by Rodney with Ruth's probable model is not what he claims. They continue their investigation and wait for the woman to leave her office, following her into the street and watching her enter Portway Studios, where she discusses with an old lady. They listen to their conversation and scrutinize her carefully, concluding that she is not Ruth's claimed model or source of her identity: "And the more we heard her and looked at her, the less she seemed like Ruth. It was a feeling that grew among us almost tangibly, and I could tell that Ruth, absorbed in a picture on the other side of the room, was feeling it as much as anyone" (Ishiguro 2005:149). As Chrissie remarks, "'Well, I think we're agreed, aren't we? That isn't Ruth's'" (Ishiguro 2005:150). Tommy's opinion that Ruth wouldn't have been changed if she had found her "possible" (Ishiguro 2005:127) is

supported by Kathy, who points out that one cannot live the same life as one's claimed model. Tommy and Kathy agree that Rodney's concept of the *possible* is just a story never confirmed by their guardians at Hailsham.

Ruth's view on their origin raises intuitive awareness of their identity. She advances strong arguments that the original source of their identity is in the lower-class marked by social stigma: "We all know it. We're modelled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren't psychos. That's what we come from. [...] You look in rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that's where you'll find where we all came from" (Ishiguro 2005:152-153). Ruth's distinctive identity is exposed by her way of thinking, her views and perspective on life, and by the way she tells us various stories. At this point, Ruth proves the theory put forward by Mark Currie (1998), who argues that one's story sheds light on one's identity, shaping it and disclosing it. Despite her claim of coming from a low-class society, Ruth is very educated and civilised, having a dynamic, strong personality and being open to embracing changes and challenges. Her double personality is remarked on by Kathy, who is a good psychologist. This personality helps Ruth stand out as a good actor on the world stage: "There was one Ruth who was always trying to impress the veterans, who wouldn't hesitate to ignore me, Tommy, any of the others, if she thought we'd cramp her style. [...] But the Ruth who sat beside me in my little attic room at the day's close, [...] was the Ruth from Hailsham [...]" (Ishiguro 2005:117-118). Kathy, who can be associated with a stage director, compares Ruth with an actor on a stage: "And my role, as her closest friend, was to give her silent support, as if I was in the front row of the audience when she was performing on stage" (Ishiguro 2005:118). Thus, Kathy approaches the theme of the world as a stage, suggesting that the way people play their roles on this stage makes their story and identity, which are complex and open to many interpretations.

The Hailsham students' identity is better defined by Miss Emily, a former guardian from Hailsham, whom Kathy and Tommy meet after leaving that place. When they visit Madame, they have the chance to encounter Miss Emily who tells them that their art creation for the Gallery at Hailsham discloses their distinctive identity associated with their soul: "We took away your art because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to prove you had souls at all" (Ishiguro 2005:238). Miss Emily explains that they are nothing but an experiment for scientific purposes in medicine developed by James Morningdale, who wanted to create superior human beings with superior intelligence and physical qualities, having Tommy, Kathy, and the other Hailsham students as "simply pawns in a game" (Ishiguro 2005:243). One can remark that Kathy and Tommy have played this game successfully, demonstrating their analytical and creative thinking, and contradicting Ruth's theory that they are outcasts. They make sense of their identity based on Miss Emily's story. Their own stories reveal their complex identity and enable the readers to draw their own conclusions about it.

These stories demonstrate the theory advanced by Frederick M. Holmes (1997), who argues that one's identity is in a permanent process of change across the stages of life and history. This criticist's conclusion on other postmodernist novels approaching the theme of identity is also valid for Kazuo Ishiguro's novel: "most of the novels do, as it happens, contain overt commentary supporting the idea that personal identity is the mutable product of transitory historical phases, not an autonomous entity which transcends them" (Holmes 1997:61). In line with this theory, the Hailsham students' identities are subject to change during their evolution in time as they make progress in terms of education, thinking skills and understanding their world. They demonstrate their ability to reconstruct their past and identity in their stories using their thinking skills and creativity.

4. Conclusion

In Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, the narrator, Kathy H., recreates her past and discloses her identity through her own stories. She brings back her memories of the past, thoroughly investigating them, frequently using the verbs think and see to suggest that she offers us only a subjective perspective on the past. Not only is the truth of the past exposed as a story recounted from her own subjective perspective, but it is also revealed by the stories circulated by Ruth, Tommy, the guardians at Hailsham, and the other characters, being open to various interpretations and conclusions. By attempting to interpret and make sense of their past and identity through their memories and stories, the characters in this novel reveal their postmodern condition. They are nothing but actors on the world stage who recreate Hailsham's past and shed light on its events through their own stories, personal analyses, and conclusions. Their stories reveal their complex identities despite being nothing but clones, reconstructing their pasts through their own recollections, research, and vision in their subjective accounts.

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