Memories in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*: A Clone’s Humanity

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Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005) is an account of the lives and feelings experienced by three clones ‘created’ as organ donors for humans, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy. Initially the three attend the fictional boarding school for clones, Hailsham. The school presented itself as a needed experiment at a time in which people wanted to believe that clones were less than human. The experiment was a way to prove that if clones were exposed to a certain education and stimuli, they could grow to be like humans. Subsequently, the three friends are allowed to explore the ‘outside’ world and move to a residential complex named ‘the Cottages.’ While Tommy and Ruth become donors right away, Kathy works as a ‘carer’ of other clones before she starts donating her own organs. Several years after they have lost touch, Kathy becomes Ruth’s carer. Before dying, Ruth shares Madame’s address with Kathy, encouraging her to ask for a ‘deferral’ so that Kathy can spend more time with her true love, Tommy. Madame is a lady who periodically visited Hailsham when the three friends were children, and who chose their best artwork. Tommy’s theory is that Madame collected their art to read their souls and see which clones were in love. A visit from Madame could also be a chance to ask for a deferral of his last donation. Unfortunately, Tommy and Kathy discover that Madame and Hailsham’s headmistress Miss Emily, never had the power to defer clones’ donations, and that the artwork had been used as a way to collect funding for the school.

This paper explores the role played by memory in Ishiguro’s novel and demonstrates how the process of remembering proves the humanity of the narrator, Kathy, and allows her to regain control over her life as her first organ donation gets closer. First, the paper will analyse how Kathy’s storytelling and recollection of her memories aims to discover the meaning of her life as a Hailsham student, ‘carer,’ and future donor. Second, it will concentrate on how Hailsham contributes to the identity formation of the clones. Third, it will explore the clones’ humanity and the society’s perception of them. Finally, it will investigate the
connection between the psychology of memory and geographical space in order to demonstrate that the empty fields and the shipwreck presented in the novel are metaphors of the clones’ lives.

Narration plays a large role in how memories are communicated in the book; it is the medium through which memories are shared, and it incites a dialogue with the reader. Critics have largely concentrated on the figure of Kathy as the narrator of *Never Let Me Go*. She has been defined as “impeccably lucid even when—especially when—confronting the cryptic.”¹ Throughout the novel, Kathy addresses an unidentified ‘you,’ to whom she relates the account of her own life. Anne Whitehead points out how the narrator’s address of a second-person reader is a “device commonly used in Victorian fiction to enhance sympathetic connection.”² However, Whitehead recognises that, in *Never Let Me Go*, the device becomes a way to unsettle and question the position of the reader in relation to the narrator.³ In fact, Victorian Literature could be considered Kathy’s area of specialization, since it is the field Kathy chooses when she has to decide on the topic she wants to investigate in the essay to be completed at the Cottages. Kathy’s narrative style might therefore have been influenced by her academic study of Victorian Literature. In any event, the direct address explicitly engages the reader, and Ishiguro aims at activating his readers’ attention. In fact, the author states that a reader should not passively follow the events recounted by the narrator, but also consider questions such as “why has she remembered this event just at this point? How does she feel about it? And when she says she can’t remember very precisely what happened, but she’ll tell us anyway, well, how much do we trust her?”⁴ Ishiguro wants his readers to reflect on the process of storytelling and on what brought the narrator to relate a certain event in a specific way. Through the narrator’s dialogue with her listener, Ishiguro establishes a dialogue with his own readers.

² Anne Whitehead. "Writing with Care: Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*," *Contemporary Literature* 52, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 58.
³ Ibid.
In order to understand the process of remembering that Kathy embarks upon, not only is it important to focus on her voice as narrator, but also examine the figure to whom she addresses her account. Whitehead reports Mullan's interpretation of the 'you' with whom Kathy shares her memories, identifying him/her with another clone—but not necessarily one who attended Hailsham. According to Whitehead, Kathy's assumptions that her listener is a fellow clone "speaks of her paucity of imagination and also of the insularity of her life." However, Kathy does not explicitly refer to another 'carer' or to a donor, even if she does mention that, in the past, she has discussed with one of her patients many of the same events related in her account. At first, thinking back to the way she felt when she had even less experience of the world, Kathy says to her addressee that she is "sure somewhere in your childhood, you too had an experience like ours that day; similar if not in the actual details, then inside, in the feelings." She also repeatedly asks her listener to remember what she has already told him/her. Kathy's words are revealing: "you have to remember that to us, at that stage in our lives, any place beyond Hailsham was like a fantasy land; we had only the haziest notions of the world outside and about what was and wasn't possible there." Her statement suggests that she might not be talking to a donor. In fact, one of her patients would probably have shared the same experience of being a confused student in his/her early days as a clone. When Kathy asks her listener to remember, she does not refer to the reminiscence of a shared experience, but she is requesting her listener's attention and focus. Knowing that her addressee is following her account is a motivation for Kathy to continue with the recollection of her memories, a process that helps her discover the meaning of her life. More specifically, narration becomes the mirror through which Kathy sees the reflection of her own life and helps her make sense of it.

According to the way in which Kathy chooses to reconstruct her past, her addressee may also be a donor, someone who attended an institution where clones were allowed to come in contact with the outside world. This option would explain why the listener needs to be provided with explanations of how things worked at Hailsham. In fact, when Tommy and Kathy visit Madame's dwelling and discuss their early days at Hailsham, they learn about aspects that were still unclear to them during

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5 Whitehead, "Writing with Care,"107.
7 Ibid., 66.
their days at the Cottages. In spite of having been repeatedly told, while at Hailsham, that they were “special” students, they were not able to understand the reason why the clones coming from other schools were so interested in learning about theirs. Thanks to Miss Emily, they learn that not all schools are like Hailsham. In fact, Miss Emily says that “When Marie-Claude [Madame] and I started out, there were no places like Hailsham in existence.” Hailsham is perceived by Kathy, Ruth and Tommy as a safe environment, and considered a special place. Ruth affirms that “It’s all part of what made Hailsham so special ... The way we were encouraged to value each other’s work.” Her statement proves that they did enjoy their formative years in the school and do not think of that time as the beginning of their exploitation. Narrating her experience at Hailsham to a donor would therefore be a process that allows Kathy to better understand her existence.

While the donors’ bodies are disassembled because of the donations, Kathy’s continual remembrance allows her to assemble her own identity. Through the recollection of memories, Kathy attempts to reassemble the body—if not physically, creating a corpus of memories that attests to her existence, in the face of an activity that repeatedly dismantles the body and the self. Not only is this process therapeutic for Kathy, in the sense that it helps her go through the difficulties of being a ‘carer,’ but it also helps her patients. By listening to Kathy’s stories—or to Kathy, Tommy and Ruth’s accounts at the Cottage—her patients attempt to replace uneasy memories with ones that could be more reassuring and comforting. Even donors who attended Hailsham are longing to talk about the past. Specifically, they enjoy remembering the days at the school, when they were not entirely aware of their future of loss. Operating on one’s memories is a way to heal—both physically, as the patient is recovering from a donation—and psychologically, as the feelings attached to the event are causing pain. Kathy’s words are revealing: there have been times over the years where I’ve tried to leave Hailsham behind, when I’ve told myself I shouldn’t look back so much. But then came a point when I just stopped resisting. It had to do with this particular donor I had once ... it was his reaction when I mentioned I was from Hailsham ... I realised then how desperately he didn’t want reminding. Instead, he wanted to hear about Hailsham.”

8 Ibid., 261.
9 Ibid., 17.
10 Ibid., 5.
Kathy’s donor wants her to talk about Hailsham because hearing about that “beautiful place”\(^{11}\) is a way to distract his attention from the fact that he knows he is not going to make it out alive of his third donation. Moreover, operating on her own memories is a process that allows Kathy to regain control over her life, just a few months before she starts undergoing donations herself.

Spending their formative years at Hailsham allows Kathy, Ruth and Tommy to develop a strong bond with one another, which contributes to their identity formation. Deborah Britzman offers an interesting study of the name that Ishiguro chooses for Kathy, Ruth and Tommy’s school. The critic says that “Its name [Hailsham] means what it says: the children, with no parents, are greeted by a sham that they can’t quite figure but that manages to hail them.”\(^{12}\) The school has a strong influence on their perception of the outside world. Growing up at Hailsham, being exposed to the routine of the school, and meeting different guardians, are all experiences that nourish their minds and allow them to develop as individuals. It is through these experiences that they realise that they are “really different from them; that there are people out there, like Madame, who don’t hate you or wish you any harm, but who nevertheless shudder at the very thought of you—of how you were brought into the world and why—and who dread the idea of your hand brushing against theirs.” This “cold moment . . . troubling and strange” is the first step toward their full development as individuals, which culminates when Kathy tells Miss Emily that the Hailsham experience “might be just some trend that came and went [for the guardians] . . . But for us, it’s our life.”\(^{13}\)

In spite of not having grown up in the ‘real world’, clones learn about it and are trained to act ‘like humans’ thanks to Hailsham. Keith McDonald points out that Hailsham’s students have not experienced infancy—an aspect that differentiates *Never Let Me Go* from the “fictive autobiographies [that] usually include some information about the birth and parentage of the subject.”\(^{14}\) The clones learn about the notion of family and what it represents, while being aware that they do not have

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\(^{11}\) Ibid.

\(^{12}\) Deborah P. Britzman "On Being a Slow Reader: Psychoanalytic Reading Problems in Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*,” *Changing English* 13, no. 3 (December 2006): 313.

\(^{13}\) Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 266.

parents. Their first contact with this concept is constituted by the role-play activities practiced at Hailsham during which students learn about the social conventions of the outside world. Kathy states that, when they are children, “any place beyond Hailsham was like a fantasy land.” However, they attend classes where they “had to role play various people we’d find out there – waiters in cafés, policemen and so on.” These sessions “get [them] excited and worried all at the same time”, because they are an occasion to get familiar with the ‘fantasy land’ that is the world outside of Hailsham. Moreover, the clones gain knowledge of the world 'out there' when they are at the Cottages. There they are both able to access media and are allowed to go on day-trips. Kathy notices that veteran couples copy “mannerisms … from the television” and reprimands Ruth for hitting Tommy on the arm, as it is “not how it works in real families.” Kathy seems therefore able to discern which attitudes belong to the 'real' world and which are simply fictional.

Since clones do not have memories of their parents, they are fascinated by the idea of meeting their 'possibles', the individuals after which they have been modelled. This gives them a confirmation of their humanity. Specifically, Kathy is hoping to recognise her ‘possible’ from the pictures of the porn magazines that she finds at the Cottages—as having been modelled on a porn star would explain her sexual needs, which make her uncomfortable and worried. In the same way, Ruth is hoping to find her ‘possible’ working in an office in Norfolk, as clones believe that the lives of their ‘possibles’ would give them an idea of what their future might have been, if they did not have to 'complete' — which is to pass away after their final donation. Clones believe that, by seeing their ‘possibles,’ they would “get some insight into who [they] were deep down, and maybe too, [they]’d see something of what [their] life held in store.” Finding their ‘possibles’ would reassure clones that the sensations they feel are human. Moreover, it would give them the impression that there is someone out there who looks exactly like them and functions as an 'ancestor' that legitimates their existence.

Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go, 66.
Ibid., 110.
Ibid.
Ibid., 120.
Ibid., 124.
Ibid., 140.
Through the recollection and interpretation of past memories, Kathy gains a fuller sense of her self before she begins the process of taking her self apart more literally, through donation. More specifically, Kathy’s phrasing measures the present perception against the past perception. In fact, the analysis and re-examination of what happened in the past is constant in the novel, and made evident by the vocabulary chosen by Ishiguro. Phrases frequently used are “Thinking back now,”21 “I realize now,”22 “When I think about this now, it seems to me,”23 “now I think about it, I’d say,”24 “Looking back now,”25 and “Looking at it now.”26 During the recollection process, Kathy feels the need to provide her listener with a series of explanations. First, sentences such as “I should explain why I got so bothered by Ruth saying what she did”27 are an attempt to justify her selection of events. Second, Kathy’s digressions and elaborations function to order and explain the events that she intends to present. Throughout the course of the novel, Kathy analyses the past, looking back from her present perspective. Her goal is to find reasons and explanations, re-evaluating previous events from her thirty-one-year-old-‘carer’ perspective. Memories, however, are important not only to Kathy talking from the present. When they were kids, Kathy and her classmates actually used to get excited at the memory of past purchases during the sales and exchanges. The adult ‘carer’/donor clones can better understand from their present perspective all the mechanisms that were not comprehensible to them during their early days as students. For example, they realise that they could have known more about their condition from Miss Lucy: “I’m sure now, in the light of what happened later, that we only needed to ask and Miss Lucy would have told us all kinds of things.”28 In that particular moment of their life, they already knew that they were different from the guardians and all the ‘normals,’ but their memories are blurred. While certain memories are indistinct, others are very clear – Kathy, in fact, stores “pictures”29 of past moments

21 Ibid., 36.
22 Ibid., 37.
23 Ibid., 72.
24 Ibid., 88.
25 Ibid., 95.
26 Ibid., 102.
27 Ibid., 126.
28 Ibid., 69.
29 As Kathy keeps ‘pictures’ of past moments, the reader needs to assemble the clues provided by her narrative in order to “get a picture of what really happened and why”
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in her mind. Looking back, things start to make sense and/or take on a different meaning. Therefore, when the clones become adolescents, start wondering about things, and try to find answers, they find that re-living past events becomes particularly significant. By examining and figuring the real meaning of those events, Kathy and her friends aim at giving a sense to their lives. Kathy states that her conversation with Tommy by the pond is “a turning point. I definitely started to look at everything differently. Where before I’d have backed away from awkward stuff, I began instead, more and more, to ask questions, if not out loud, at least within myself.”

Time alters the perception of events and helps Kathy in attaching meaning to what happened in the past. As a result, her evaluation of memories facilitates the process of assembling her own self.

The subjectivity of memories is another indication in the novel of how memory is changeable, not only when it comes to temporal distance, but also to perspective, and contributes to making the clones human. Tommy, Kathy and Ruth, in fact, have contrasting memories of the same events. Kathy not only embarks upon a process of self-formation, in order to construct her own personal history, but also learns how to see other points of view. Looking back at Tommy’s temper tantrums, Kathy mentions that she is not sure when they started. She admits: “My own memory of it is that Tommy was always known for his temper, even in the Infants, but he claimed to me they only began after the teasing got bad.”

Similarly, Ruth and Kathy’s memories of an episode differ: “When I was discussing it with Ruth a few years ago at the centre in Dover, she claimed Miss Lucy had told us a lot more; ... I’m pretty sure she didn’t.”

Even when she is working as Ruth’s ‘carer,’ Kathy still gets angry at her when she pretends not to remember past occurrences. In particular, Kathy cannot accept Ruth’s pretending to have forgotten things about Hailsham—which she values as some of her most important memories. Tommy recognises that Ruth had always had a different approach to memories and life, and reminds Kathy that “what [she’s] got to remember about Ruth ... [is that] she was always different to us. You and me, right from the start, even when we were little, we were always


Ibid., 77.
Ibid., 21.
Ibid., 82.
trying to find things out." While Kathy is interested in recollecting her memories, Ruth deliberately alters or pretends to forget the past. Ruth does not want to embark upon the search for the meaning of their lives because it is a painful process. The analysis and re-interpretation of past events help Kathy understand Ruth’s perspective and her effort “to move on, to grow up and leave Hailsham behind.” It is only from a present perspective and thanks to the experience she has accumulated that Kathy can understand how Ruth really felt.

Ruth might have a different approach to memories than Kathy’s, but ‘normals’ have memories as well—and these memories acknowledge the clones’ identities. When Kathy and Tommy enter Madame’s house, they are not sure whether she remembers them or not. As soon as Miss Emily joins them, she immediately talks about remembering them and being remembered: “I remember, you see. I dare say I can remember you all … I recognised you, but you may well not have recognized me. In fact, Kathy H., once not so long ago, I passed you sitting on that bench out there, and you certainly didn’t recognize me then.” In the same way, Madame finally admits to remembering the day in which she witnessed Kathy’s dancing with her pillow to her tape of Judy Bridgewater’s *Songs After Dark*: “Kathy H. I remember you. Yes, I remember … A mind-reader … I only recognised you just now. But yes, I remember that occasion. I still think about it from time to time.” Not only do the clones look back at the past, but Madame does as well. The Gallery, Madame’s collection, is what remains to remind Miss Emily and Madame of the Hailsham experience. The keepsakes guardians used to collect and preserve the memories they have of their students, as well as the knowledge that they allowed them to have “better lives than [they] would have had otherwise.” Moreover, the students’ artworks symbolically represent their souls, separated from their bodies. Daniel Vorhaus believes that Miss Emily’s revelation of the purpose of the Gallery is Ishiguro’s way to declare the true aim of his novel, which is “to demonstrate that the reign of the nameless, faceless clone is drawing to a

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33 Ibid., 284.
34 Ibid., 130.
35 Ibid., 258.
36 Ibid., 270.
37 Ibid., 265.
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close." Vorhaus actually points out that, in the novel, the depiction of clones moves away from the traditional portrayal of these entities, providing them with “unique names, faces, and personalities,” that allow the reader to see clones as “anything other than remarkably normal.” Therefore, not only is the Gallery a legitimization and justification of the Hailsham experiment, but it is also a device to recognise the clones’ identities.

The scholarship has investigated the morality of cloning for decades. Patrick D. Hopkins, for example, has identified three facets of cloning as an ethical problem: the loss of human uniqueness which follows the creation of clones, the motives behind the decision to clone, and the “fear of ‘out of control’ science creating a ‘brave new world.’” In Never Let Me Go, by setting up the Gallery, the guardians wanted to prove that their students had souls, in order to demonstrate the students’ humanity and in opposition to the general belief that cloning was morally acceptable simply because the students were inhuman. What makes the clones human is not only their ability to mime the behaviour of the ‘normals’ and produce artworks, their humanity is actually intrinsic in their capability to have emotions and feelings. Moreover, the nostalgia experienced by Kathy is another proof of her humanity, whether it is the nostalgia of the days at the Cottages, the wish to start working on her essay again, or her desire to “stop, think and remember,” which urges her to re-organize her memories. Thinking back about the Gallery, Kathy remembers “the excitement and pride” they would feel when one of their works had been selected. Furthermore, she mentions their “mixed emotions” and a “strong mix of emotions” that overwhelmed her. At times, she would not remember the exact words she said on a specific occasion, but the feelings she felt. Looking back at the days at the Cottages, Kathy says that she “can’t remember exactly what I said to

39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
42 Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go, 37.
43 Ibid., 31.
44 Ibid., 40.
her [Ruth] that night, but I was at that point pretty sceptical.”46 This insistence on feelings and emotions shows how the characters are as human as the ‘normals.’ Kathy’s memories are likely to fade away, or at least to be altered. However, while Kathy’s patients may actually want to forget their own memories and let them vanish, Kathy makes it clear that she is not willing to forget hers: “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.”47 Thus, Kathy’s memories may differ slightly from what really happened, but they stay with her. The inconsistency of those memories is actually an additional proof of her humanity, seeing as human memory is highly susceptible to change.48 Her statement is a way to legitimize the importance of the clones’ feelings and what they all went through, and fill a future of loss with significance.

Especially after the Morningdale scandal,49 society wants to avoid any contact with the clones so that they cannot perceive their potential humanity. In fact, if the clones started to be regarded as humans, the ethics of their existence and treatment would become an issue. Vorhaus attributes inhumanity not to the clones, but to the society that surrounds them: “It is the fear of the unknown, shadowy clones, in addition to the instrumental treatment of those clones, that is both cause and effect of society’s fear, and that represent all that is inhuman in Ishiguro’s story. None of that inhumanity belongs inherently to the clones themselves.”50 When science offers new possibilities to cure previously fatal illnesses, people prefer “to believe these organs appeared from nowhere, or at most

46 Ibid., 141.
47 Ibid., 286.
49 Miss Emily explains to Kathy and Tommy that the Morningdale scandal concerned a scientist named James Morningdale, who wanted to “offer people the possibility of having children with enhanced characteristics. Superior intelligence, superior athleticism, that sort of thing” (263–4). When Morningdale’s research is discovered, institutions put an end to his work. The scandal creates an atmosphere of fear, as people are reminded of the donation program. As a result, corporations and politicians stop supporting Hailsham and the school needs to be closed.
that they grew in a kind of vacuum.” Madame is representative of the fear experienced by society since the moment in which she witnesses Kathy’s dancing to the Judy Bridgewater tape. Madame has a strong reaction:

I saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, efficient, yes. More cures for the old sicknesses. Very good. But a harsh, cruel world. And I saw a little girl, her eyes tightly closed, holding to her breast the old kind world, one that she knew in her heart could not remain, and she was holding it and pleading, never to let her go. That is what I saw. It wasn’t really you, what you were doing, I know that. But I saw you and it broke my heart. And I’ve never forgotten.

As the guardians start to realise how human the clones are, they realize that an institution like Hailsham, “experimental in attempting to prove to the wider world that clones are more than the sum of their bodily parts,” needs to be closed. Gabriele Griffin asserts that “the renaming—students, instead of clones—functions to (re-)humanise the clones, to make them ‘like us.’” Miss Emily explains to Kathy and Tommy that “people tried to convince themselves [that clones] weren’t like [them]. That [clones] were less than human.” Moreover, Miss Emily asserts that the world’s request of organs was the “barrier against seeing [clones] as properly human.” The founders of Hailsham fight to get “many improvements” for their students. Such a demonstration of the guardians’ willingness to acknowledge the clones’ similarity to humans cannot be contemplated by society and the Hailsham experiment needs to be brought to an end.

Arguably, one characteristic that does not make the clones completely human is their acceptance of their future. From the reader’s perspective, “the breeding of a class of humans for use as a source of organ transplants

51 Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go, 262.
52 Ibid., 272.
55 Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go, 263.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
must be seen as a socially organized and approved system of murder,” but the clones do not seem to worry about being exploited by the ‘normals’. Clones completely accept that they have been created only for organ transplantation. Even if ‘carers’ have a car at their disposal, they never try to escape from their destiny. Their only attempt is to obtain a deferral, even if deep inside they know that the rumours about the possibility of getting one are likely to be untrue. Their conception of the future relates to their treatment of the past in the fact that their memories show how they have never been exposed to rebellious examples. Therefore, as clones are not familiar with this conduct, they do not consider insurgence an option and their acceptance of their destiny is the only trait that makes them appear inhuman.

What it means to be human is one of the main questions raised by Ishiguro’s novel. Love is not the only feeling involved. More broadly, one needs to consider how feelings and emotions are produced, and what their effect is on characters. The reactions the characters have to their friends’ behaviours prove that feelings influence their lives. Kathy, for instance, talks about her “emotional flurry,” that “in [her] usual way,” she’s not able to let “just pass.” The clones portrayed in the novel have an ‘expiry date’ and are aware of it—as in the case of Tommy and Kathy, who know that they cannot share a future together. Tommy perfectly captures the impossibility of having a traditional future together when he says:

> I keep thinking about this river somewhere, with the water moving really fast. And these two people in the water, trying to hold onto each other, holding on as hard as they can, but in the end it’s just too much. The current’s too strong. They’ve got to let go, drift apart. That’s how I think it is with us. It’s a shame, Kath, because we’ve loved each other all our lives. But in the end, we can’t stay together forever.

Tommy and Kathy know that they will be unable to spend the rest of their lives together, and they knew it even before they found out that the

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59 Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go, 58.
60 Ibid., 282.
deferrals were no more than a rumour. However, they tried, and they cared—and this is what makes them human above all else.

Significantly, the psychology of memory is connected to the geographical space explored in the novel: both the fields Kathy observes while driving and the boat function as metaphors of the clones’ lives. Whitehead suggests that the “Norfolk field seems, powerfully, to designate the novel itself,”\(^6\) as Kathy’s narrative has “caught and held all of the things that she has lost in the course of her life.”\(^6\) McDonald offers a similar interpretation, of the novel representing a “symbolic field, where past things surface,”\(^6\) with the narrator and the reader “looking for traces of lives lost.”\(^6\) The novel closes with Kathy standing by a field and starting to imagine

just a little fantasy thing, because this was Norfolk after all, and it was only a couple of weeks since I’d lost him … I half-closed my eyes and imagined this was the spot where everything I’d ever lost since my childhood has washed up, and I was now standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I’d see it was Tommy, and he’d wave, maybe even call.\(^6\)

In the novel, Norfolk is presented as the place where all lost things end up. Kathy stares at fields that not only collect all the people and things she lost, but also represent the memories she has been recollecting. Ishiguro’s characters need to re-experience past events because they are afraid of perceiving their lives as empty. The empty fields Kathy observes while driving from one centre to the other represent their lives, as well as their non-existent future—which does not exist because the clones have already passed away or know that, eventually, they will. Not only the fields, but also the boat that all donors are longing to see and that Kathy, Ruth and Tommy visit when they reunite, can be read as a metaphor of the clones’ lives. All donors know about the fishing boat “stranded in the marshes,”\(^6\) even if it is not clear where it came from. Ruth guesses that

\(^6\) Whitehead, “Writing with Care,”\(^8\).
\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Ibid., 82.
\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Ibid., 216.
“Maybe they wanted to dump it, whoever owned it. Or maybe sometime, when everything was flooded, it just drifted in and got itself beached.”

The shipwreck is on the border of land and sea, as the clones are on the border of human and inhuman. Moreover, just as the boat is immovable, the clones must live a life that has already been planned for them and which they cannot escape.

At the point when her body is about to be taken apart due to her first donation, Kathy is able to better understand her existence thanks to the process of storytelling she embarks upon. Operating on her own memories allows Kathy to fully develop as an individual and demonstrate her humanity. What makes the clones human is their capability to have feelings and emotions, and the subjectivity of their memory, debatably a distinctly human faculty, which belongs to the clones as well. The recollection of past memories allows Kathy and her fellow clones to escape the sense of emptiness that a future of loss would otherwise entail, and gives a sense to their existence.

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67 Ibid.
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