

Personal Growth and Confinement: A Spatial Study of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) through the lens of spatial theories by Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, and Gaston Bachelard, focusing on the protagonist Kathy's growth within spatial and societal constraints. By tracing Kathy's journey from childhood at Hailsham to disillusioned adulthood, the study examines how her interactions with geographical, social, and psychological spaces shape her evolving self-awareness and identity. The novel's depiction of clones, confined within institutions like Hailsham and the cottages, serves as a metaphor for marginalized groups, highlighting their struggles for self-assertion in oppressive systems. Spatial analysis reveals how physical spaces (e.g., Hailsham, donation centres) reflect societal control, while social spaces (e.g., Kathy's relationships with Tommy and Ruth) influence her understanding of her role. Psychological spaces, including memories and dreams, further illuminate her growth. Ultimately, this article argues that Kathy's journey symbolizes the resilience and agency of marginalized communities. By navigating and resisting spatial constraints, she embodies the possibility of personal growth amidst oppression. Ishiguro advocates for recognizing the humanity and dignity of those rendered invisible by societal structures. This study contributes to the scholarship on spatiality in literature by offering new perspectives on the intersections of personal growth, confinement, and identity in *Never Let Me Go*.

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro; *Never Let Me Go*; growth; confinement; spatial study

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INTRODUCTION

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) profoundly explores space, identity, and clone agency. While often categorized as dystopian science fiction, the novel's primary concern is not technological advancement but rather the spatial and growth constraints that shape individual and collective identity. Spatiality has long been a critical theme in literature, particularly in science fiction, where physical and psychological spaces frequently serve as arenas for exploring control, self-discovery, and existential uncertainty (Black & Barnes, 2021; Csicsery-Ronay Jr, 2002; Edrei, 2019; Salisbury, 2006). Science fiction often examines how spatial constraints influence character development, societal structures, and ideological paradigms, as seen in works ranging from George Orwell's *1984* to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, as well as more recent novels such as Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*, N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth Trilogy*, and Cixin Liu's *The Three-Body Problem* (Cao, 2019; Cole, 2023; Conaway, 2021; Hawkes, 2024; Minico, 2019; Moldovan, 2020; Tyner, 2004). These narratives frequently depict confined spaces—whether dystopian states, enclosed institutions, or artificially controlled environments—that dictate characters' agency, aspirations, and resistance.

Recent scholarship on spatial theory has underscored the significance of space as an instrument of power and a site of self-realization. Michel Foucault's (1984) concept of 'heterotopia' describes spaces that simultaneously isolate and normalize their inhabitants (Beckett et al., 2017; Patrão, 2022), which resonates with Ishiguro's portrayal of Hailsham. Similarly, Henri Lefebvre's (1991) theory of 'social space' highlights how environments are not merely physical settings but socially constructed realities that shape identity formation (Zhuang, 2024). Gaston Bachelard's (1964) exploration of 'the poetics of space' further informs this study, particularly in understanding how memory and spatial experience intertwine in Kathy's narration, revealing tensions between belonging and displacement (Bouacida et al., 2021; Rich, 2015). By examining *Never Let Me Go* through the lens of spatial theory, this study investigates how Ishiguro constructs space as a mechanism of power, confinement, and self-realization. As the novel's central setting, Hailsham functions as a space of both nurturance and surveillance, embodying the paradoxes of institutional control. The clones' lives are structured within rigid spatial boundaries that dictate their movements and eventual fates. Beyond Hailsham, the novel's spatial dynamics extend to the Cottages and donation centres, each representing different stages in the clones' journey toward self-awareness and resignation. These spaces function as liminal zones, reinforcing the novel's broader themes of marginalization and existential uncertainty. Positioning *Never Let Me Go* within the broader discourse of spatiality in literature, I emphasize how Ishiguro employs space to explore identity, agency, and ethical considerations surrounding human value. By situating the novel within contemporary debates on spatial constraints and growth, this paper offers a nuanced interpretation of how Ishiguro's characters navigate their constrained existence, ultimately illuminating the novel's profound humanistic concerns.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarship on Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* has explored various themes, including identity, ethics, and the human condition, often through the lens of the clones' growth and marginalization. Pallathadka et al. (2021) examine the novel's metaphorical exploration of humanity's struggle to confront mortality, arguing that the clones' desires for life, love, and memories mirror universal human fears. They also critique the dehumanizing effects of science and technology, suggesting

that Ishiguro highlights how advancements in these fields can erode social connections. Similarly, Murphy (2021) interprets the clones' acquiescence to their fate as organ donors through "castration desire," proposing that their acceptance of diminishment offers a model for other-oriented relationality. Mattar (2022) further complicates the ethical discourse surrounding the novel by challenging normative conceptions of the "human." She argues that Ishiguro's use of clones critiques liberal humanist ethics, which often exclude difference while promising inclusion, and instead presents a posthuman ethics that forces readers to confront their reliance on exclusionary definitions of humanity. Pattison (2024) extends this discussion by situating the novel within neoliberalism, emphasizing how the clones' deep understanding of humanity is rendered powerless against the systems that exploit them. Some scholars have analyzed the novel through spatial theory, though this approach remains underexplored. Bouacida et al. (2021) draw on Gaston Bachelard's conception of space to examine Hailsham as a oneiric house or childhood home, emphasizing its role in shaping the clones' memories and emotional experiences. Their analysis highlights the intimate connection between space and identity but does not fully explore how spatial constraints influence the clones' growth and marginalization. Chen (2021) investigates the interplay between geographical space, time, and identity in the novel, noting how spatial displacement underscores the passage of time and the inevitability of the clones' fate.

While prior studies have acknowledged the role of space in shaping the clones' identities, they have not fully explored its metaphorical and theoretical implications as a narrative device. In particular, the dual function of Hailsham as both a nurturing and controlling space remains underexamined about the clones' psychological and emotional development. Additionally, the application of spatial theories—such as Henri Lefebvre's concept of social space, Gaston Bachelard's poetics of space, and Michel Foucault's heterotopia—has been limited. This study seeks to fill these gaps by applying a robust theoretical framework to analyze how space constrains and enables growth in *Never Let Me Go*. By integrating these perspectives, this study deepens the existing scholarship on Ishiguro's novel and contributes to broader discussions on spatiality in literature.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Henri Lefebvre, in his seminal work *The Production of Space* (1974), argues that "space is a (social) product" (Henri & Donald, 1991, p. 26). His three-dimensional dialectical model categorizes space into spatial practice, representation of space, and representational spaces (Solak, 2022, p. 185). According to Henri and Donald (1991):

Spatial practice embraces production and reproduction, as well as the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation [...] Representations of space are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, signs, codes, and to 'frontal' relations. Representational spaces embody complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as well as art (which may eventually be defined less as a code of space than representational spaces).

(p. 33)

Lefebvre's theory underscores that space is not merely a passive backdrop but an active force shaped by and reinforcing social structures and power dynamics. This aligns with Michel Foucault's extension of spatial theory, where power is embedded within spatial organization. According to Shabanirad and Dadkhah (2017), "For Foucault, space is not a pre-existing terrain.

Instead, in his work, the very production of space and its relation to power is at stake (p. 117). In *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault introduces the concept of heterotopias, alternative spaces that connect to and subvert dominant social structures. Foucault and Miskowiec (1986) state:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society, which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the actual sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location.

(p. 24)

Unlike utopian spaces, which exist in abstraction, heterotopias are real spaces that simultaneously reinforce and disrupt social norms. As Bellamy (2024) notes, Foucault's analysis of disciplinary institutions, such as prisons and schools, further illustrates how spatial configurations structure power relations. His notion of panoptic power highlights how spatial arrangements enforce surveillance and self-regulation, making space a medium through which power operates. Expanding beyond physical and social dimensions, Gaston Bachelard explores the psychological and poetic dimensions of space in *The Poetics of Space* (Chimisso, 2017; Kaplan, 1972). For Bachelard, space is deeply intertwined with memory, imagination, and emotional resonance. He views the home as a site of personal meaning, stating:

In short, in the most interminable dialectics, the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter. He experiences the house in its reality and virtuality through thought and dreams.

(Bachelard, 2014, p. 45)

Bachelard's spatial imagery can be categorized into two key aspects. First, the house is a fundamental security and identity formation space where memories and childhood experiences shape the self. Second, hidden spaces within the home, such as "wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms, are veritable organs of the secret psychological life" (p. 100). Bachelard sees these spaces as expressions of inner emotions and imagination, profoundly influencing individuals' lives and psyche (Lee & Kim, 2023, pp. 65-84).

As noted by Rachmani (2021), the spatiality of modernist novels often exhibits a pervasive metaphorical quality arising from both the foregrounding and internalization of space. Building on these theoretical foundations, I examine space in the novel *Never Let Me Go* through three interconnected dimensions: geographical, social, and psychological. Geographical space refers to the material environment in which the protagonist exists. Lefebvre's theory of space production suggests that these physical spaces are not neutral but are shaped by social power relations. The novel's spatial arrangements reflect survival dilemmas and the structured power dynamics that shape the protagonist's identity. Social space focuses on interpersonal relationships and societal structures, drawing on Foucault's concept of heterotopias. It examines how the protagonist navigates spaces of control, negotiation, and resistance, highlighting the role of power in shaping identity. Finally, psychological space explores the protagonist's internal world through Bachelard's framework, revealing how memories, emotions, and personal reflections contribute to self-understanding and transformation. By integrating Lefebvre's spatial production, Foucault's power structures, and Bachelard's poetics of space, this framework provides a comprehensive lens for analyzing the novel. It reveals the intricate connections between space, identity, social relationships, and psychological development, demonstrating how spatial configurations serve as a crucial symbolic tool in the protagonist's coming-of-age journey.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs the spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, and Gaston Bachelard to analyze the geographical, social, and psychological dimensions of space in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005). Lefebvre's concept of spatial production underscores how geographical spaces, such as Hailsham and the donation centres, function as sites of regulation and segregation while reflecting broader societal politics and class structures. Building on Lefebvre's insights, Foucault's theory of power relations in spatial constructions illuminates how the novel's spatial configurations reinforce social hierarchies and constrain the protagonists' agency. Meanwhile, Bachelard's notion of psychological space provides a lens for examining how personal spaces—such as childhood environments and memory-laden locations—shape individual consciousness and identity. The primary data source for this study is *Never Let Me Go*, which offers a rich textual landscape for analyzing the interplay of space, power, and agency in a dystopian setting. The novel follows Kathy H., Tommy D., and Ruth as they transition from the secluded environment of Hailsham to the Cottages and, ultimately, the donation centres, where they confront their predetermined roles as organ donors. These shifting spaces illustrate the evolving constraints on their autonomy and self-perception, making the novel *Never Let Me Go* an ideal case study for exploring the intersection of space, identity, and power. This research adopts a close reading approach to examine the novel's spatial dynamics in detail. Key passages will be selected based on their relevance to the study's theoretical framework, with a focus on how geographical, social, and psychological spaces are constructed and interconnected. Lefebvre's triadic model will analyze the spatial practices and representational spaces of Hailsham and the donation centres. At the same time, Foucault's concept of heterotopias will be applied to examine the Cottages as an alternative space that reinforces and subverts societal norms. Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* will guide the analysis of Kathy's psychological attachment to Hailsham and other memory-laden locations, revealing how these spaces shape her identity and emotional struggles. By systematically examining these spatial dimensions, this study aims to uncover how Ishiguro uses spatial configurations to reflect broader societal concerns and explore the human condition within a controlled and surveilled world. The close reading methodology enables a nuanced interpretation of the novel's spatial dynamics, providing deeper insights into the interplay of space, power, and identity in *Never Let Me Go*.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This study delves into the personal growth of the clones through various spaces portrayed in *Never Let Me Go*. A meticulous examination following the guiding principles within the analytical framework makes it apparent that *Never Let Me Go* can be classified as a distinctly contemporary growth novel. The primary settings where protagonist Kathy resides—Hailsham, the Cottages, and the donation centre—each represent different stages in her life's journey: from innocent childhood through the complexities of youth to the disillusionment of middle age. However, growth in this context transcends chronological ageing; it entails continual self-awareness and an evolving understanding of the world. Through the narrative depiction of space, the novel vividly portrays the characters' life trajectories. Furthermore, these spatial narratives serve as metaphors for the human existential experience, reflecting the author's profound contemplations of life.

SURVEILLANCE AND CONFINEMENT: THE LOSS OF SELF-IDENTITY IN CLOSED SPACES

As Bal (2009) argues, characters in literary works are intricately tied to their geographic space, with their emotional changes often reflecting transformations in their spaces (p. 145). This connection highlights how environmental shifts can profoundly influence the characters' internal states. Geographic space provides the geographical settings for events and story development and serves as a geographical representation of societal power structures. "Space is never empty: it always embodies a meaning" (Henri & Donald, 1991, p. 154). Therefore, physical examination encompasses superficial depiction and inherent symbolic significance carried by geographic spaces. In *Never Let Me Go*, the narrative explores shifting physical environments experienced by the clones as they transition from the confines of Hailsham to the Cottages, ultimately leading them toward the donation centres. These spaces structure their precarious existence and reflect broader human oppression and exploitation themes. The clones, conditioned within these confined environments, gradually accept their fate, illustrating how spatial boundaries reinforce systemic control. The spatial trajectory of the clones aligns with Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, where institutions function as mechanisms of surveillance and regulation. Foucault argues that physical spaces are not merely passive settings but active instruments of control that shape individuals' behaviours and self-perceptions. In this context, Hailsham and the other institutions in *Never Let Me Go* can be understood as disciplinary spaces that subtly enforce submission and obedience. To further unpack this dynamic, it is helpful to examine Foucault's analysis of disciplinary institutions, particularly his discussion of prisons as paradigmatic sites of surveillance and control.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault asserts that prisons are the most evident examples of micro-institutions embodying disciplinary power (Driver, 1985; Jasim Khammas, 2025; Olumofin, 2025). He explains that the architectural design of disciplinary power extends beyond prisons to institutions such as armies, hospitals, and schools, all functioning to normalize and internalize control. The panoptic prison, designed by Jeremy Bentham, exemplifies this function by maximizing surveillance and regulation, fully realizing the disciplinary mechanism of power as described by Foucault:

Bentham's Panopticon is the architectural figure of this composition. We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with expansive windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and shut up a madman, a patient, a condemned man in each cell. A worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery.

(Sheridan, 1977, p. 200)

The defining characteristic of a circular prison is its central watchtower, with a spatial design that ensures all surrounding structures remain visible from this central point. The cloned individuals' living environment reflects this circular prison's architectural principles. The morphology of an inner and outer circular prison characterizes Hailsham. The Hailsham, where the clones live, is an isolated boarding school. In the author's depiction, Hailsham presents such a scene:

Hailsham stood in a smooth hollow with fields rising on all sides. That meant that from almost any of the classroom windows in the main house—and even from the pavilion—you had a good view of the long, narrow road that came down across the fields and arrived at the main gate.

(Ishiguro, 2017, p. 17)

The elevated and enigmatic forest is a surveillance point over Hailsham in the valley. Internally, Hailsham adopts a circular architectural layout. The spatial composition is simple yet deliberate: the central building, towering above, is surrounded by dormitory blocks, a playground, and a pond. The central building, occupying the highest position at the centre, operates as a watchtower, ensuring that the administrators or any observer can oversee the entire exterior through its windows, including the main road leading to the entrance. This design reinforces the constant visibility and control characteristic of a disciplinary space.

Foucault argues that both prisons and classrooms serve the function of controlling others (Friedrich & Shanks, 2023, p. 20). The confined space of a prison ensures that inmates' actions are visible to the guards. Similarly, the environment within Hailsham functions to that of a prison, with each clone seemingly fixed in a specific position, their every action under surveillance, and all clone students constantly visible. Hailsham, isolated from elsewhere, confines the freedom of clone students; invisible confinement is pervasive, with their “private conversations” being a pertinent example:

However, at Hailsham, the lunch queue was one of the better places to talk privately. It was something to do with the acoustics in the Great Hall; all the hubbub and the high ceilings meant that so long as you lowered your voices, stood quite close, and made sure your neighbours were deep in their own chat, you had a fair chance of not being overheard.

(Ishiguro, 2017, pp. 11-12)

This description illustrates the invisible control exerted by enclosed spaces and demonstrates why Hailsham lacks private spaces for clone students despite seemingly being filled with hiding places. Foucault points out many modern institutions are dedicated to producing and training ‘docile bodies’, and for these institutions, the docile body can be harnessed and transformed (von Schrittz, 1999, pp. 391-411). Hailsham controls students by manipulating physical and psychological spaces. Firstly, there is the overall surveillance in physical space—Hailsham possesses a clandestine controlling power, and the cloned students are aware of being monitored. Hence, they never dare to behave defiantly, reminding themselves to adhere to the school’s regulations, thus achieving the goal of “self-imprisonment”. Secondly, there is the surveillance of psychological space—Hailsham resembles a psychological laboratory, with cloned students as experimental subjects and a series of educational courses established by guardians, the hidden forces controlling these cloned students. As mentioned earlier, Hailsham is similar to a circular prison, where educated cloned students become punished objects, and this punishment occurs in specific ritual spaces. Guardians encourage students to create artworks and poetry, ostensibly as a means of education to assess whether cloned students differ from normal individuals in their developmental levels. “Creativity” is important for all cloned students, serving as a standard for Hailsham to determine whether they possess a soul. If their work receives approval from guardians or is chosen for the “gallery” by the Madame, it will be a great honour. This judgment method is essentially a form of remoulding and taming individuals and a way to control people’s psychological spaces.

Kathy notes, “I can see we were just at that age when we knew a few things about ourselves—about who we were, how we were different from our guardians” (Ishiguro, 2017, p. 18). She first realizes their difference from normal humans when they notice that Madame always tries to avoid them. They experiment to confirm their suspicion, and the results prove them right. “Madame was afraid of us. But she was afraid of us, in the same way, someone might be afraid of spiders” (p. 18). To mitigate the presence of these ‘spider’ donors, they are exclusively confined to specific locations such as Hailsham. Donors like Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy are perceived as possessing disconcerting attributes by the general populace, symbolized by the character ‘Madame.’ Madame’s fear of the clone students stems from a deep-seated unease toward the unfamiliar, reinforcing a rigid boundary between humans and clones. This fear reflects a broader societal tendency to construct artificial separations that justify exclusion and dehumanization. By attributing responsibility for their existence solely to the clones and rejecting the implications of cloning, society fosters a sense of detachment from reality, reinforcing both human resistance to cloning and the clones’ struggles with identity and self-worth. As Kathy and her peers grow up, they transition to the Cottages, a space that offers more freedom and openness than Hailsham. However, the Cottages function primarily as a temporary refuge rather than a place of genuine autonomy, serving as a transitional space where clones await their inevitable fate as organ donors:

The Cottages were the remains of a farm that had gone out of business years before. There was an old farmhouse around it, barns, outhouses, and stables all converted for us to live in. Other buildings, usually the outlying ones, were virtually falling down.

(Ishiguro, 2017, p. 54)

The Cottage stands at the centre, the most functional and well-preserved building in the area. Indeed, due to its height and the integrity of its structure, the surrounding area is constantly within its view, creating an environment that mirrors the surveillance-like nature of a panopticon, where the clones are always under observation, adding to the sense of confinement and control. Indeed, the advantage of the panoramic surveillance architecture lies in its ability to deconstruct the binary unity of seeing/being seen. According to Foucault, in the central watchtower of the building, one can observe everything without being observed. At the same time, at the outer edge of the circular structure, people are watched but cannot observe (Hope, 2005, pp. 359-373). The design ensures that the central watchtower can monitor the peripheral circular spaces with minimal staffing, as those in the outer ring are unaware of being watched. Even when the tower is unoccupied, the people in the circular structure constantly feel the psychological pressure of being observed. This creates a continuous sense of surveillance. The spatial arrangement enforces power, making the clones remain in a constant state of vigilance, as they are always aware they could be watched. Over time, this external surveillance gradually transforms into self-regulation and peer surveillance, ensuring that the clones maintain their discipline and never act out of line, “You have to remember, since we had been in each other’s company constantly since arriving at the Cottages, none of us could have read *War and Peace* without the rest noticing” (Ishiguro, 2017, p. 57). Although humans control the Cottages, and no direct caretakers instruct their every move, the entire space remains under constant surveillance. Although the clones are free to move around, they always remember that they must return by a set time.

We rarely stepped beyond the confines of the Cottages. We did not even walk about the surrounding countryside or wander into the nearby village. We were not afraid exactly. We all knew no one would stop us if we wandered off, provided we were back by the day and when we entered Keffer’s ledgerbook. (p. 55)

Hailsham and the Cottages function as disciplinary spaces that subtly regulate the clones' perceptions of themselves. While these places are presented as nurturing, they simultaneously impose a system of control that shapes the clones' understanding of identity and self-worth. Through an "indoctrination" style of education, they are conditioned to accept their fate, leaving them unable to challenge the structures that confine them. Kathy lacks the necessary reference points to develop an autonomous sense of self like her peers. Though filled with ordinary moments, her memories reflect a constrained consciousness shaped by Hailsham's authority. The clones' isolation and internalization of social norms result in fragmented self-identities, where personal aspirations are subsumed under the institutional framework defining their existence. In this space structured by power and surveillance, their selfhood is gradually eroded, with Kathy's journey illustrating the tension between submission and the faint, persistent yearning for autonomy.

NAVIGATING SOCIAL SPACES: IDENTITY FORMATION AMIDST CONFLICT AND EXCLUSION

The protagonists in the growth process must confront themselves and cope with the impact of significant social relationships such as family, friendship, and love. Kazuo Ishiguro once mentioned in an interview that interpersonal relationships are one of the focal points of his novels (Ikezono, 2024, pp. 291-312). In Kathy's growth journey, the guardians at Hailsham, her peers at the cottages, and her professional life as an adult form distinct social spaces. These social spaces, each in its form, document Kathy's growth, with her actively participating in them.

In terms of nomenclature, the instructors of students should be called "teachers" rather than "guardians." Snaza (2015) points out that the word "guardian" is from Plato's *Republic* and retains an agonistic sense from that text. Guardians protect their charges, ensuring they are not attacked and/or that they do not escape. "Guardian" inescapably indexes a kind of power or force: the guardian protects" (p. 224). This notion of protection is central to the role of the Hailsham guardians in *Never Let Me Go*. As clones, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy initially experience what appears to be a nurturing environment. The guardians provide them shelter and education, fostering a sense of security. However, this protection is ultimately a means of control. The guardians' authority over the students ensures compliance, subtly conditioning them to accept their predetermined fate. As Kiat (2017) observes, the protection at Hailsham "must be understood as obliging one to obey the name of law (or the state)" (p. 38). The true nature of this so-called protection is revealed when Kathy and her companions confront Headmistress Emily about the possibility of a deferral. Emily's response exposes the extent to which the guardians shaped their perceptions and restricted their autonomy:

Yes, in many ways, we fooled you [...] But we sheltered you during those years and gave you your childhoods... But if she had had her way, your happiness at Hailsham would have been shattered. You built your lives on what we gave you. You would not be who you are today if we had not protected you.

(Ishiguro, 2017, p. 127)

Here, "protection" is emphasized multiple times, indicating that the guardians maintain strict surveillance and control over Kathy and her peers at Hailsham. They must adhere rigorously to all of Hailsham's rules without any deviation. Weekly health check-ups conducted by the guardians are mandatory, and smoking is strictly prohibited:

But at Hailsham, the guardians were really strict about smoking. I am sure they would have preferred it if we never found out smoking even existed [...] And then there were the actual lessons where they showed us horrible pictures of what smoking did to the insides of your body.

(p. 33)

In the designated activity areas set by the school, the clones can participate in various activities such as playing football, painting, and attending the “exchange,” all carried out under the strict supervision of the guardians to ensure order. Kathy and her peers must complete their required coursework, where the guardians teach them basic life knowledge, with a particular focus on health management to ensure their organs remain in optimal condition for future donations. Every morning, they must attend an assembly, standing in formation to listen to announcements before sitting on the floor for the head guardian’s lecture. The head guardian, silent yet imposing, exudes an icy presence that instils fear and strict obedience, ensuring the clones never dare to defy the rules.

Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, the three “fellow travellers” in their journey of growth, almost always find themselves in constant disagreement, yet they remain inseparable companions, acting together. Their shared identity as individuals who grew up in Hailsham sustains their close relationship. At the Cottage, the students from Hailsham share a cultural identity, but as they engage more deeply with their older cottage companions, they increasingly question the education they received before. Most students are changing and abandoning their previous beliefs and habits. As Kathy describes it,

In our early days at the Cottages, the idea of not finishing our essays would have been unthinkable. But the more distant Hailsham grew, the less important the essays seemed. I had this idea at the time—and I was probably right—that if our sense of the essays being important was allowed to seep away, then so too would whatever bound us together as Hailsham students. That is why I tried for a while to keep going our enthusiasm for all the reading and note-taking. But with no reason to suppose we’d ever see our guardians again, and with so many students moving on, it soon began to feel like a lost cause.

(p. 94)

However, as Hailsham gradually fades from their lives, these essays seem less and less important. Kathy realizes that the essays are the bonds that tie Hailsham students together, the basis for maintaining their relationships with each other. Therefore, she had been encouraging everyone to maintain learning and reading habits. However, she fails, as almost everyone gives up on their connection to Hailsham and no longer dreams of returning. As their identification with Hailsham’s culture is stripped away, the students’ close ties to Hailsham loosen, and their intimate bonds within the community unravel.

Ruth pretends to have amnesia about her experiences at Hailsham to dissociate herself from it, hoping to emulate the behaviour of the “veteran students” and eager to establish close ties with the mainstream group. This also reflects a split in her sense of identity, as Kathy recalls:

I had had this notion there were two quite separate Ruths. There was one Ruth who was always trying to impress the veterans [...] But the Ruth who sat beside me in my little attic room [...] was the Ruth from Hailsham.

(p. 60)

When they travel together to find Ruth's cassette tape, Ruth sits between Tommy and Kathy in the car, with her head stuck between the two front seats, talking to the two veterans, preventing Tommy and Kathy from communicating with her or with each other. Kathy suggests swapping seats so that she and Tommy can talk to each other to pass the time. However, Ruth refuses Kathy's request and accuses Kathy of always being difficult and causing trouble. Ruth gradually distances herself from Tommy and Kathy, and the decreasing communication and the waning platonic intimacy between them indicate the growing alienation in their relationship.

According to Henri and Donald (1991), "Man does not live by words alone; all 'subjects' are situated in a space in which they must either recognize themselves or lose themselves, a space which they may both enjoy and modify." (p. 35). These clones deny the harsh realities of their existence by immersing themselves in fantasy, a coping mechanism closely tied to Hailsham's spatial confinement. The isolated and controlled environment discourages any desire to explore the external world, reinforcing their limited perception of reality. As a result, they fail to recognize their distinctive identity as clones, as the spatial boundaries of Hailsham shape not only their physical movements but also their psychological outlook, keeping them trapped in a constructed illusion of normalcy. The clones' lack of awareness about their identity is also attributed to their departure from the truth. Since infancy, these clones have been indoctrinated by their guardians and are destined to become donors as adults: "If we were keen to avoid certain topics, it was probably more because it embarrassed us. We hated the way our guardians, usually so on top of everything, became so awkward whenever we came near this territory" (Ishiguro, 2017, p. 34). Influenced by their guardians' attitudes, the clones resist making awkward inquiries.

Why do Kathy, Tommy, and their peers choose not to express opposition or refusal after learning about Hailsham's purpose and underlying truth? They fail to consider potential strategies such as protest, boycott, or escape (Toker & Chertoff, 2008). Initially, the clones are reduced to a state of 'bare life' by being confined within spatial isolation. Subsequently, they undergo a process that transforms them into compliant 'tame bodies' and voluntary donors, achieved through various implicit disciplinary measures. Ruth justifies her emotional response as a donor by stating, "I think I was a pretty decent carer. But five years felt about enough for me. I was like you, Tommy. I was pretty much ready when I became a donor. It felt right. After all, it's what we're supposed to be doing, isn't it?" (Ishiguro, 2017, p. 107). Moreover, the powers that be effectively employ the concept of an 'exceptional state' to establish normalcy for unconventional demands resulting from institutionalized instruction. However, the clones fail to perceive the concealed political violence and power oppression inherent in this notion of normality due to its superficial appearance. I argue that the clones' search for their "possible" counterparts reflects their identity formation and self-recognition struggle. Kathy observes, "Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us" (Ishiguro, 2017, p. 65), highlighting their anxiety over origins and self-definition. Their fixation on finding their originals underscores their desire for validation and wholeness, yet this pursuit reinforces their sense of otherness. This reflects a broader existential struggle as the clones navigate spaces that simultaneously offer a sense of belonging and reinforce their marginalization.

Hadi and Asl (2022) note that "The process of *I* formation begins in infancy once a baby fully recognizes his image in the mirror, and then realizes that the image is hollow as he finds the relation between his various gestures and the image produced from the movement" (p. 149). The clones believe that discovering their originals will provide insight into "a deeper understanding of who they are". Consequently, they observe potential models or friends in public spaces such as cities, shopping centres, and transportation cafes. Despite recognizing themselves as human beings

who desire a similar life to their “possibles,” the search process reveals their subservient position within society. According to Heidegger, existence can be understood in spatial terms, where space is not merely physical but embodies a mode of human existence mainly related to dwelling (Park, 2024, pp. 135-143). In *Never Let Me Go*, spatial transitions mark different stages of the clones’ identities and reflect shifts in their existential states. After leaving the Cottage, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy move to the recovery centre to fulfil their ultimate purpose. As a relatively free space, the Cottage offers them a temporary illusion of autonomy, whereas the recovery centre represents their inescapable fate. Through this spatial transition, their roles also change: Kathy becomes a carer, taking on the responsibility of looking after donors, while Ruth and Tommy ultimately succumb to organ donation.

Indeed, Kathy’s acceptance of her role as a carer further underscores the novel’s critique of how social spaces shape identity not through liberation but through control and exclusion, however, despite the restrictions on identity formation imposed by the spatial control and discipline described by Foucault, as well as the socially produced spaces analyzed by Lefebvre, Kathy and her fellow clones never entirely lose their longing for agency and realization. Their construction of an inner psychological space reflects Bachelard’s belief that small, intimate spaces, such as rooms or corners of a house, serve as reservoirs of memories and personal experiences (Kenny, 2020, pp. 1113-29). These spaces evoke emotions and help form the inner world of the self.

MEMORY AND SELF-DISCOVERY: PSYCHOLOGICAL SPACES OF LONGING AND REALIZATION

As Lawson (2007) notes, “Space is at the core of human communication, fundamental and universal” (p. 6), and how the deliberate spatial segregation and regulation by human communities created a sense of oppression for the clones. However, Kathy and her peers unconsciously counter this by using space as a means of resolution. Faced with the hidden power dynamics and surveillance embedded within these spaces, they do not passively submit but silently resist, carving out their mental sanctuaries in those “hidden corners” and actively constructing their private psychological spaces. I contend that the cassette tape Kathy acquires at the “exchange” is a significant intersection of memory, identity, and space. While Nakamura (2021) highlights its emotional significance, it also plays a key role in connecting physical and psychological spaces, as seen through Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*. Bachelard suggests that spaces, whether real or imagined, shape one’s sense of self by becoming repositories for memories and emotions. In Kathy’s case, the tape is an emotional anchor tied to Hailsham, a protective and confining place. Bachelard’s concept of intimate spaces, such as “nooks” and “corners,” aligns with Kathy’s attachment to the song *Never Let Me Go*, as listening to the tape creates a private space where the boundaries between past and present blur. In these intimate, solitary moments, Kathy experiences emotional growth as the physical environment reflects her inner psyche. The tape also occupies a liminal space between Hailsham and Kathy’s present life, marking her transition from the controlled space of the school to the disorienting freedom of the outside world. It becomes a means for Kathy to reconnect with Hailsham, both as a physical place and a psychological space she must navigate. In this way, the tape functions as a shelter and a site of psychological tension, forcing Kathy to confront the distance between her memories and her current reality. Kathy’s relationship with the cassette tape reflects her broader journey of identity formation, illustrating how memory and space intertwine in self-discovery.

At Hailsham, when the dormitories are empty, Kathy listens to the music repeatedly, immersing herself in a fantasy world: she imagines herself as a mother, holding a pillow in her arms like a child. As she dances along to the music, she suddenly notices their guardian, Miss Emily, standing outside the door, crying softly. Kathy is puzzled by this until she and Tommy visit Miss Emily together. As Miss Emily explains to them,

Maybe you read my mind [...] You see, I imagined it was about this woman who had been told she could not have babies. But then she had had one, and she was so pleased, and she was holding it ever so tightly to her breast, really afraid something might separate them, and she is going baby, baby, never let me go.

(Ishiguro, 2017, p. 129)

Kathy will never forget this scene, as she experiences human emotions, unleashing her maternal instincts. Later, she realizes that the cassette tape also awakens Miss Emily's sympathy for the clones. Through her solitary moments of playing the music cassette, Kathy constructs her private space to express her delicate emotions. This psychological space reflects Kathy's strong desire to understand herself and find belonging. I concur with some scholars' notion that private space complements public space, stating that private space is composed of family and friends, providing sheltered areas for individuals (Low, 2023). These extremely ordinary "spaces" harbour happy memories unknown to humans, providing clone individuals with experiences of happiness. As described by French philosophers De Certeau and Rendall (2004), this is "another kind of spatiality," an experience that is "anthropological, poetic, and mysteriously felt about space" (p. 93).

From a narrative perspective, memory can also be a redrawn map, guiding people through past days (Williams, 2021). Ruggiero et al. (2021) noted that spatial memory is psychological space (pp. 433-454). According to Bergson et al. (2004), in *Matter and Memory*, memory takes two forms. One is "image memory," which records all the daily events in a person's life, preserving past events vividly. The other memory is more "automatic," reconstructing past experiences. Many literary works use recollection as the protagonist's self-reflection on their history. Only through reminiscence can one know and understand until one achieves self-perfection. Memory is fragmented and selective. Thus, history is reconstructed through recollection, and memory is pieced together by significant events (Decker et al., 2021). It is these series of events that determine a person's life trajectory. In cognitive psychology, spatial memory is defined as the part of memory responsible for recording personal information, including the environment and its spatial location, and it is a cognitive map (Farzanfar et al., 2023). In *Never Let Me Go*, under the regulation and control of physical and social spaces, Kathy preserves her sense of using "objects," seeking "hidden corners" to place emotional memories as human beings, constructing a substantial psychological space to resist fate.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard (2014) proposes that the homes we inhabit are not merely physical shelters; they also "protect our non-self" (p. 3). On the one hand, homes provide living space for people, while on the other, they offer solace to weary individuals. Without a home, people become displaced. Homes protect individuals amidst natural and life's storms, serving both body and soul (p. 5). The home is the source of initial happiness. Physically, homes have definite indoor boundaries, symbolizing happiness and tranquillity. The nostalgia for home is a natural response for those who have left home. In this novel, for Kathy and her peers, Hailsham holds their fondest memories of home. As Sloane (2023) notes, Hailsham is their belonging and sanctuary (pp. 146-169). After growing up, Kathy, with her "fellow travellers", never returned to Hailsham, as it

can no longer provide the shelter and tranquillity of a home. In purely material terms, it has also been destroyed. However, their sense of belonging and security with Hailsham remains alive in their memories, providing solace throughout their lives.

Even long after the students have left Hailsham, it remains an important element in their upbringing, connecting them in space and time. Memories of Hailsham always flash in Kathy's mind, carrying her growth story. The characters' memories are frozen in an eternal space. In other words, "the time remembered is never flowing, but rather the memory of places and spaces experienced; these memories weave and present past life" (Harvey, 2020, pp. 235-242). Hailsham exists in the world in space, leaving indelible emotions and memories in Kathy's heart, sustaining her inner peace and happiness:

These moments hit me when I'm least expecting it, when I'm driving with something else entirely in my mind. So maybe at some level, I am on the lookout for Hailsham [...] It's like with my memories of Tommy and of Ruth. Once I'm able to have a quieter life, in whichever centre they send me to, I'll have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that'll be something no one can take away.

(Ishiguro, 2017, p. 136)

As AlAmmouri and Salman (2021) note, modern Bildungsroman sets growth goals for the protagonists that are not about complete victory but rather about a transcendent spirit rooted in facing and challenging the fundamentals (p. 228). *Never Let Me Go* is not a novel intended to express despair and sadness; instead, it aims to express an optimistic attitude toward life. Just as Jewish psychologist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl affirmed,

If a person can accept all the suffering imposed by the machinery of fate and shoulder his cross, then even in the worst circumstances, there is still ample opportunity to deepen the meaning of life, allowing life to retain qualities of endurance, dignity, and selflessness.

(Bushkin et al., 2021, p. 233).

The experiences of Kathy and others from childhood to adulthood, from ignorance to self-realization, reveal the complexity of human growth and the individual's struggle against fate. Just like Sisyphus in Camus' myth, pushing the boulder of fate destined to roll down repeatedly, they transcend life and achieve greatness in this process. Using the psychological space of memory, Kathy repeatedly holds onto everything that she has been deprived of, thereby resisting despair, and in this process, she transcends her destiny.

CONCLUSION

Kathy's growth is not merely an accumulation of personal experiences but a process of seeking subjectivity within spatial constraints. Ishiguro employs physical spaces such as Hailsham, the Cottages and the donation centres to illustrate the restrictive environments imposed on the clones. Simultaneously, social spaces—such as Kathy's relationships with Tommy and Ruth—reveal the interplay between dependence and resistance within their community. Furthermore, psychological spaces, including memories and dreams, shape her understanding of selfhood, framing growth as a gradual awakening at the intersection of space, identity, and power.

Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is a profound exploration of societal oppression and how individuals navigate and resist unjust systems. Through the lens of the clones, particularly Kathy, the novel metaphorically reflects the experiences of marginalized and oppressed groups. Their struggles—marked by coping, compromise, and resistance—reveal the complexities of survival within oppressive structures, prompting readers to reflect on broader themes of social injustice and human dignity. Ishiguro avoids reducing the clones to mere victims; instead, he endows them with cognitive and reflective capacities, allowing them to exercise limited agency and subtle resistance within a highly controlled world. As Mattar (2022) argues, the novel “restructures our ethical frames of reference and opens up possibilities for thinking about ethical responsibility and action” (p. 4), extending its critique beyond fiction to illuminate the invisibility and exploitation of marginalized communities in real-world contexts.

By integrating spatial theories from thinkers such as Lefebvre, Foucault, and Bachelard, this study examines how physical, social, and psychological spatial structures shape individual identity and influence developmental pathways. Ishiguro's nuanced portrayal of space underscores his engagement with themes of humanity, dignity, and the lived experiences of marginalized groups. This analysis not only deepens our understanding of the novel but also invites further exploration of its implications for contemporary bioethics, mechanisms of social control, and the intersections of space, identity, and power. Future research could build on this foundation to investigate how Ishiguro's spatial narratives resonate with ongoing debates about inequality, autonomy, and the ethical responsibilities of society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper was presented orally at MICOLLAC 2023. The authors extend their sincere appreciation to the editor and anonymous reviewers for their valuable and thought-provoking suggestions, which have significantly enhanced the quality of the paper.

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