

## The Storyteller's *Nostos*: Recreating Scheherazade and Odysseus in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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This article studies the account of Kathy H., protagonist of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005), as the confluence of narratives through which an individual and her community construct their identity based on the remembrance of the events that have marked their lives, as well as on the literary texts and cultural conventions that have served as the archetypes upon which the narratives of their lives are built. Two paradigmatic figures stand out in Kathy's story: Odysseus, the lost seafarer endeavouring to return home, and Scheherazade, the artful storyteller of the *Arabian Nights*. From this perspective, Kathy's recollection constitutes her attempt to return to the mythic place that Hailsham has come to represent for clones that, unable to be carried out on physical terms, induces her to find alternative means to recover it through memory and storytelling. As a result, she constitutes a replication of Scheherazade, adapting this figure to her dystopian and postcolonial context in a narration that explores the interplay between memory, fiction and identity.

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro; Scheherazade; Ulysses; storytelling; un-belonging; memory

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### El *nostos* de la narradora: recreando a Sherezade y a Odiseo en *Never Let Me Go* de Kazuo Ishiguro

A lo largo de este ensayo se estudiará la narración de Kathy H., protagonista de *Never Let Me Go* (2005) de Kazuo Ishiguro, como la confluencia de narrativas a través de las cuales el individuo y su comunidad construyen su identidad. Esta convergencia resulta del recuerdo, la tradición literaria y los fetiches culturales que sirven de arquetipos sobre los cuales se construye la narrativa de sus vidas. Dos figuras paradigmáticas se yerguen como pilares interpretativos de la historia: Ulises, el navegante perdido que sueña con el regreso a casa y

Sherezade, la habilidosa hilandera de historias de las *Mil y una noches*. Desde esta perspectiva, el recuento de Kathy se elabora como el intento de retornar al mítico lugar en el que Hailsham se ha convertido para los clones a través de la continua recreación de anécdotas, recuerdos y experiencias. Ante el fracaso de esta empresa, Kathy recurre a métodos alternativos para recuperar este paraíso, lo que conduce a la transformación de la protagonista en una Sherezade distópica en un contexto poscolonial dentro de una narración que explora la relación entre memoria, ficción e identidad.

Palabras clave: Kazuo Ishiguro; Sherezade; Ulises; narración; desarraigo; memoria

## I. INTRODUCTION

Kazuo Ishiguro published in 2005 his sixth novel, *Never Let Me Go*, a work that could be labelled as dystopian science fiction, as it presents an alternative reality of England in which humans are able to prolong their life spans by harvesting the organs of clones raised solely for this purpose. At the age of eighteen, clones become carers, taking care of donor clones until they start donating themselves and, eventually, they “complete,” that is, they die. John Freeman argues that this novel does not use a historical context—unlike Ishiguro’s previous novels—and also eludes some of the conventional motifs of science fiction, like the saliency of “gadgetry and technology” (2008, 196). Despite its divergence, the novel, however, “circles the same thematic territory of memory” as the rest of Ishiguro’s *oeuvre* (196); Kathy H., its clone protagonist and narrator, recounts her memories of her upbringing alongside her dearest friends Ruth and Tommy as she waits for the time when she will finally become a donor. Unlike most of the clones in England, the three friends were lucky enough to attend Hailsham, a project designed to shelter such children from the horrors and truth of their lives (Ishiguro 2005, 263) by attempting to offer them a normal childhood. Kathy’s account, after Tommy and Ruth have died and Hailsham has closed, concentrates on the reconstruction of significant everyday experiences, portraying the fantasies created and believed in the midst of such a bleak context. Although Freeman’s remark delimits the purpose of Kathy’s account to a need to “make sense of [...] her pre-shortened life” (2008, 197), this essay will show how her goal is in fact not so individualistic since it is also an attempt to entertain, distract and comfort herself and her audience, the donors under her care.

As a result of this context, the novel has been analysed primarily from the angle of postcolonial criticism, highlighting the different forms that discrimination and objectification adopt in this “postracial” reality that is “saturated in racialized forms of discrimination,” as Josie Gill claims (2014, 846). In her work, Gill offers a summary of other authors’ standpoints concerning the novel that can be synthesised as the oppression of an objectified Other. Similarly, other authors like Robbie B. H. Goh have also included the novel within this trend, coining the term “postclone-nial” (2011, 50) due to its display of discrimination, power struggles and the individual’s search for identity. In his work, Goh, identifies Kathy’s account as being the means to forge a national identity, thus constituting a diasporic community (66, 69) after Hailsham’s closure. At the core of all diasporas, Avtar Brah asserts, we find the subtexts of home and belonging, the former defined as a “mythic place of desire” in the imagination of diasporas; a “place of no return” even when it is possible to physically visit it (1996, 192).<sup>1</sup> In its most essential terms, diaspora represents a journey to settle down and establish one’s roots (182). The journey of each individual from any given community merges into a single voyage with those of other social groups “via a confluence of

<sup>1</sup> However, Brah claims that this longing for home does not always imply “a desire for ‘homeland’” (1996, 180) or to return to the place of origin (193), since for her there is an inherent tension in the concept of diaspora between “a homing desire” and criticism of “discourses of fixed origins.”

narratives, as it is lived and re-lived, produced, reproduced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory" (183). The identity of a diaspora, Brah continues, is established "in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively" (183).

This article studies Kathy's account as an example of this confluence of narratives, where an individual and her community construct their identity based on the remembrance of the events that have marked their lives, as well as on the literary texts and cultural artefacts that have served as the archetypes upon which the narratives of their lives are built. Two paradigmatic figures stand out in Kathy's story: Odysseus, the lost seafarer endeavouring to return home, and Scheherazade, the artful storyteller of the *Arabian Nights* / *One Thousand and One Nights* (henceforth *Nights*). From this perspective, Kathy's reconstruction constitutes her attempt to return to the mythic place that Hailsham has come to represent for clones: a location that is not accessible in physical terms, which induces her to find alternative means to recover it through memory and storytelling. As a result, she can be understood as a replication of Scheherazade, adapting this figure to her dystopian and postcolonial context in a narration that explores the interplay between memory, fiction and identity.

The relationship between Kathy, Scheherazade and Odysseus and their respective literary works can be perceived both within the text, in its structure, themes and motifs, as much as in the intertext. In Ishiguro's novel there are blatant references to *One Thousand and One Nights* and the *Odyssey* when, at one point in Kathy's account, she reads them to Tommy (Ishiguro 2005, 233). The connection to the *Odyssey*, reinforced through the reference to James Joyce, author of *Ulysses* (Ishiguro 2005, 137), is established through the story's images of the wanderer and the journey of return, the *nostos*, shaped in Western tradition by Homer (Murnaghan and Gardner 2014, 3). The *Arabian Nights*, in its monumental influence on Western literature,<sup>2</sup> is responsible for the idea of storytelling as a means to delight, to teach, to heal and, most of all, to survive. Its relation to Ishiguro's work can also be established through another literary reference: George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), mentioned recurrently in *Never Let Me Go* (Ishiguro 2005, 120-121, 124). Due to the British context of the protagonist's world, the *Nights* are approached from the fascination that Western culture has had for the text over time. Alicia Carroll has explored the link between Eliot's work and the *Nights* in her postcolonial reading of Ishiguro's novel and the analysis of the theme of the search for an identity (1999, 219). A further connection can be drawn between the *Odyssey* and the *Nights* since, according to Irwin (1994, 71), there are some similarities between these works, particularly in stories like those of Sinbad the Sailor. The focus of this essay, however, shall centre on the understanding of *nostos* not just as the journey back home, but as "saving oneself from any lethal danger, surviving" (Bonifazi 2009, 506), a connotation on which the three texts converge.

<sup>2</sup> For a complete list of the influence of *Arabian Night*, see Khan (2012, 39) and Irwin (1994, 237, 290-91).

The novel starts with Kathy's own introduction of herself as a veteran carer waiting to receive the order to become a donor, in the period after she has lost her dearest friends and her home, Hailsham. The lack of future prospects and of relief in the present prompts in Kathy a nostalgic longing for the past. The sense of loss that permeates Kathy's account (Freeman 2008, 196) can be identified as one of the central elements of nostalgia which, according to Hilary Dickinson and Michael Erben, is deeply related to infancy in the sense of the loss of "an imagined ideal childhood" (2006, 228). Thus, the interaction between memory and fiction is crucial to the feeling of nostalgia, since in the latter's "partially imagined version of the past" (Casey 1993, 366; quoted in Drag 2014, 138), idealisation is "complicit in distorting the past in accordance with the desired image" (138). What this highlights is an understanding of memory as a process of reconstruction—as stated in Bartlett's theory of memory (Bartlett 1932, 213-214; quoted in Drag 2014, 7)—which is subjectively flawed and susceptible to manipulation, not that different from a work of fiction. A similar approach to the fictionalisation of remembrance can be reached from the standpoint of trauma. As Leigh Gilmore indicates, the physical wound or damage that the original Greek word denotes (2001, 6) has evolved to also refer to injuries to "the soul" and to "memory itself" (25). Current neurological research has demonstrated how trauma shrinks the hippocampus, the brain structure responsible for memory, resulting in characteristic failures in memory (31). The traumatised subject, however, not only has to cope with the deterioration of his or her memory, but also with another central aspect of trauma: its articulation. Such hardship is a direct result of the categorisation of trauma as something that eludes representation since trauma is "beyond language" and "confronts it [language] with its insufficiency" (6). The blanks that result from both forms of breakdown can, then, be filled by fiction. As Gilmore puts it: "Memory's fragility, the enduring hold of trauma, and the complexity of self-representation do not simply make memoir inherently vulnerable to fantasy. Rather, the subject-who-remembers engages mental and narrative dynamics that partake necessarily of fantasy" (42). In cases of trauma, these dynamics cannot easily be either assimilated or removed from memory and self-representation, which leads Gilmore to conclude that "dissimulation of the subject in the scene of fantasy parallels the dissimulation of the subject in the scene of memory, trauma and self-representation" (42). This fictional dimension converges with the concept of diaspora and with Svetlana Boym's definition of nostalgia as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (2001, xiii). It is our belief that, in Kathy's account, this is precisely what Hailsham constitutes, an understanding suggested by its idyllic characterisation and by Kathy's reticence to search for it during her travels from one donor care centre to another. Her inhibition could be explained through Boym's identification of two different types of nostalgia: reflective, focused on "the longing itself" which delays "the homecoming-wistfully, ironically, desperately"; and restorative, centred on the *nostos* and attempting "a transhistorical

reconstruction of the lost home” (xviii). Both of them are present in Kathy’s account: her initial reticence to look for Hailsham’s actual location, even though she desires it, develops into an attitude of romantic longing that eventually leads her to start the process of reconstruction that is represented by the account itself, a psychological and metaphorical journey back home.

## 2. REPLICATION OF THE ODYSSEAN NOSTOS

As previously stated, this journey is sourced on the Greek tradition of the returning warrior, most notably represented by Ulysses in the *Odyssey*.<sup>3</sup> Despite their vastly different contexts, we can establish significant resemblances between Kathy and Ulysses through the perspectives offered in the contemporary critical attitude to Homer’s poem, besides the already mentioned dimension of *nostos* as a form of overcoming dangers and survive. Contemporary critics of the *Odyssey* highlight a tension between the stability and the instability of the work’s main concepts, home and identity (Murnaghan and Gardner 2014, 8). Although Ithaca and its remembrance serve as the anchor for Ulysses’s sense of self, establishing his past and guiding his future (Giannopoulou 2014, 265), as his journey progresses he resorts to the creation and adoption of various other identities to ensure his own survival and success (266). As “Noman” to Polyphemus (*Odyssey* IX, 124), or as a beggar to his family and subjects in Ithaca (*Odyssey* XIII, 184), Murnaghan and Gardner understand the cunning Ulysses as a master of language. As a producer of seductive fictions (2014, 14), an ability held as a central value in the *Odyssey* (8), Ulysses uses this tool in the creation of new-selves (13). This is seen especially in Ulysses’s introduction in the court of the Phaeacians (*Odyssey* IX-XIII, 115-173), seen by Boyd as a “carefully controlled presentation of his autobiography” (2014, 197). The same attitude could be attributed to Kathy’s autobiographical account since, taking into account the previous observations about memory, the reader’s understanding of her character depends on her selection of scenes and events, on how she wants to present herself. Even the discrepancies with her subjective narrative are used as a way to undermine the veracity of others, enabling her to appear in a favourable light in comparison (Ishiguro 2005, 57, 129). The *Odyssey*’s concern with self-making is not limited to Ulysses, since Penelope’s weaving, a medium for female expression and narrative control (Pache 2014, 60), serves as a metaphor “for the creative process or the process of self-making” (Reuter 2014, 91).

Unlike the successful conclusion of the *Odyssey*’s *nostos*—albeit undermined by Tiresias’ prophecy (*Odyssey* IX, 147-148)—Kathy’s journey, like other modern *nostos*, is destined to fail. As Murnaghan and Gardner assert, contemporary readings of Homer’s

<sup>3</sup> Although the *nostos* or homecoming was fulfilled mainly by male representatives, as Murnaghan points out, already in the *Odyssey* it “is redefined as an experience that transcends gender,” in addition to being “psychological rather than physical” (2014, 112).

work emphasise the poem's "own awareness of *nostos* as a longed-for but virtually unattainable goal" (2014, 9). Such a conclusion recalls Brah's description of the notion of "home" (1996, 192) and Boym's definition of "reflective nostalgia" (2001, xviii). The unfeasibility of Kathy's return to Hailsham stems from two facts: Hailsham's closure and Kathy's surprising ignorance about its location. The news of Hailsham's closure (Ishiguro 2005, 207) has a great impact not only on Kathy but on the rest of its former students and, it could be argued, on the whole clone community. For them, the school was mythologised beyond mere nostalgic idealisation, since in their minds it became linked to deferrals for couples (150-155). For the students, the loss of this homeland was the last severing blow to the bonds that united them (208), which may have been what prompted Kathy to try to reconnect with her past and her former friends. As such, it is the starting point of Kathy's *nostos*, compelling her during her journeys throughout England to actively look for any landscape feature that would lead her to the location of the school's ruins (6, 281). The visit to Miss Emily, Hailsham's former schoolmaster, before Tommy's final donation, confirms the deepest fears of the students, and of any clone: that deferrals for couples never existed and that Hailsham, or any institution like it, is no more (260), since even the last remnants of it, like Miss Emily's bedside cabinet, are being sold (252). One episode in this visit confirms the impossibility of the successful conclusion of Kathy's *nostos*: unlike Tommy, she is unable to recognise Hailsham in a watercolour painting in Miss Emily's house (244-245). This suggests that, even if she were to remember Hailsham's location, she may not be able to recognise it, just as Odysseus was unable to identify Ithaca upon his landing (*Odyssey* XIII, 178-182).

But Hailsham's shadow stretches far beyond Kathy's past, and into her future. As she asserts, once she becomes a donor by the end of the year, she will "have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that'll be something no one can take away" (Ishiguro 2005, 281). To her the role of donor becomes an opportunity to reconnect with her past, it opens and leads the way to Hailsham, implying not only the acceptance of her fate as a clone but also of her destiny. Thus, we meet her at the beginning of the last stages of her *nostos*, understood as the "speaker's private return to childhood, the only site of authentic experience" (Murnaghan 2014, 121). Unable to return home physically, she decides instead to open up an alternative path in the form of the active process of remembrance through storytelling. Considering her account as closer to fiction rather than to an autobiography or memoir helps to resolve one of the principal contradictions in the story: the fact that Kathy is aware and informs the reader about her future at the beginning, yet still throughout her narrative she does not dispel fantasies, like deferrals, not until its very end. What this suggests is an intention beyond mere recollection, the retelling and re-experiencing of the events for a purpose related to comfort, pleasure and postponement. Storytelling becomes the instrument not just to recollect her past but to relive it, simultaneously making her audience experience it as if it were her present, artificially overcoming the limitations of memory.



### 3. ECHOES OF SCHEHERAZADE: KATHY AS A STORYTELLER

In an essay on Kafka, Walter Benjamin wrote of the author that in his stories “narrative art regains the significance it had in the mouth of Scheherazade: to postpone the future” ([1955] 1968, 129). It is precisely this postponement of what lays ahead that we intend to demonstrate as the core of the relation between Kathy and Scheherazade, a relation in which storytelling seeks the same outcome of the Odyssean *nostos*: to survive. Within such a perspective, the figure of Penelope becomes significantly similar to these two other characters. Her “weaving (and unweaving)” has been interpreted as “a way of delaying resolution” (Pache 2014, 46). This deferred conclusion is intimately connected to death, since the embroidered tapestry is going to be used as Laertes’s funeral shroud (*Odyssey* XXIV, 323), thus also representing Penelope’s symbolic acceptance of her husband’s death (Pache 2014, 60). Although their crafts differ, the completion of each of their works would entail a metaphorical or an actual death. Due to the nature of storytelling, Scheherazade and Kathy are both aware that as soon as their stories are completed, they are destined to die, thus linking silence to death.

Scheherazade, protagonist of the main narrative thread in the *Arabian Nights*, incarnates the learned storyteller versed in the history and lore of the different regions of the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia, sources from which the text of the *Nights* is derived (Khan 2012, 38). All of these shape the backbone of the stories that she uses to delay her execution, after she decided to end the slaughter of the sultan’s mistresses with her own sacrifice. Narration as a strategy to survive or enchant or save others finds its analogy in some of the first tales of the *Nights*, as in the “Story of the Trader and the Jinni,” a connection also highlighted by Ferial J. Ghazoul (1996, 84).<sup>4</sup> In this tale, each of the three shaykhs that the merchant encounters narrates a story to the Jinni in order to spare the merchant’s life (*Nights* 1, 24-37). Similarly, the tales of the three Kalandars are narrated with the aim of escaping death at the hands of the Three Ladies of Baghdad (*Nights* 1, 82-185). Simultaneously, each of the shaykhs’ narrations and the Kalandars’ tales serve Scheherazade to deter her execution by one day more. Yet Scheherazade’s plan of narrative postponement could not be successfully carried out without the help of her sister, Dunyazad (*Nights* 1, 23-24), who, in her almost complete silence, is responsible for triggering Scheherazade’s storytelling from the first night onwards. As such, narration not only offers Scheherazade the means to delay the implementation of her sentence but it grants her the possibility of spending time with her sister, sharing the stories that are part of their life and cultural background, overcoming the alienation and sense of un-belonging suffered by those waiting for death and those who are silenced. Even though the effect of a death sentence on the human psyche is not explored in the *Arabian Nights*, we can

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<sup>4</sup> Irwin has also identified this unified thematic in relation to Mahdi’s thesis about the common origin of the first two hundred and eighty nights that eventually comprised the core of Galland’s translation (1994, 56).



see its effects in *Never Let Me Go*. Donors like Ruth and Tommy say that they feel separated from their carers' reality (Ishiguro 2005, 276), since carers cannot fully understand what it is to be a donor. Before focusing on the reading of Kathy as a replication of Scheherazade, there is one other point of connection between them, besides storytelling, that should be mentioned. Although it may be a fortuitous choice, Kathy's much cherished Judy Bridgewater cassette tape is entitled *Songs After Dark*, which may well be a reference to the *Arabian Nights* and to Scheherazade's habit of telling her stories until the break of dawn.

In "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin offers a series of characteristics that define the art of storytelling which are absent in the novel genre. Among the novel's main disadvantages, he claims, is its dependence on the book form, its isolation—and that of its author—from experience and oral tradition ([1955] 1968, 87). Though *Never Let Me Go* is a novel in format, Kathy's account constitutes an oral narration, perhaps a recording, as suggested by the verb "talk" in the following example: "But that's not really what I want to talk about just now" (Ishiguro 2005, 45). In her account Kathy addresses an interlocutor that she identifies as one of her own kind (13), a clone whose specific identity and occupation is never mentioned. Despite that uncertainty, it might be fairly reasonable to think that she may be presenting herself to her donor. This, in addition, serves to create identification between the reader and clones, Eluned Summers-Bremner argues (2006, 158), which subtly facilitates a sympathetic attitude towards them. This relationship between carer and donor gains weight when she recounts a particular experience with one of her donors who wanted "not just to hear about Hailsham, but to *remember* Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood" (Ishiguro 2005, 5; emphasis in the original). The reader might identify with that clone, asking Kathy to narrate her memories so that we could feel them as our own. Thus, through her account she transmits her own experiences to her audience, enabling others to partake in the nostalgic remembrance of Hailsham. Paraphrasing from Dennis Walder's work, Drag concludes that in a postcolonial context nostalgia can "forge a connection between people with markedly different personal, historical and national backgrounds, who are united by a shared longing of vaguely recollected times and places" (2011, 1; quoted in Drag 2014, 140). Such appropriation and reconstruction reflect one of the motivations of human narratives: the desire to merge into another's life, to belong even for a brief moment to a community. At the same time, this understanding fits Gilmore's stance on the representation of trauma. Based on Dori Laub's conclusions (1992, 69-71), Gilmore highlights the significance of narrative in trauma in that its experience is essentially different before and after the traumatised subject has been able to "organize the story in narrative terms and recount it successfully" (2001, 31). She concludes that for Laub the experience of trauma is "insufficient" for its description, and that it requires both a narrative and a listener.

The postponement of her future is perhaps connected to the essence of these experiences, since they might be responsible for Kathy's proud claims about the better performance of the donors she cares for: that they recover faster than other clones and also remain calm and composed even in their fourth—and final—donation (Ishiguro 2005, 3). In other words, they become more profitable to the system, a fact that Kathy acknowledges, believing that her long experience as a carer might result from that (3). Thus, Kathy, like the reader, might have established a connection between her excellent work and the postponement of becoming a donor, which entails her death, incurring in a *post hoc* fallacy. As a narrator Kathy can be viewed as conceited and unreliable (43, 57, 129), but there might be some veracity in her claims. The better results of her donors can be easily attributed to their carer's artful narrative skills; Kathy weaves a story in which her memories encase other memories, spinning remembrance after remembrance. She avoids a chronological structure, opting instead for an associative narration that goes back and forth, creating expectations by shifting the topic (45), or by introducing elements that are left untold until much later. Examples of such design are, for instance, the narration of her trip to Norfolk, interrupted on page 136 and then taken up again on page 144—which mirrors the inclusion of metanarratives in the *Arabian Nights*—or how she briefly mentions “the Sales” on page sixteen but does not explain what they are until page forty-two. Just as Scheherazade baited the sultan by leaving her stories unfinished and by coming up with a new tale each time she finished one—an aspect characteristic of the oriental storyteller (Benjamin [1955] 1968, 98)—so Kathy finds a way to leave her audience expectant for more of her remembered stories.

However, this line of thought meets an obstacle when taking into account the fact that Kathy knows right from the beginning that in a couple of months she is going to become a donor. Although *Never Let Me Go*'s characters can be identified by their fierce belief in rumours, fantasies and stories, indeed to the point of delusion, perhaps it would be too much to claim that Kathy really believes that she can survive by telling her story. In truth, this is analogous to one of the most recurrent and pervasive fantasies of this novel: the deferrals for Hailsham couples who can prove that they are “properly in love” (Ishiguro 2005, 151). Kathy and Ruth, and eventually Tommy in spite of his initial disbelief, still cling to this hope even though they have all grown up in Hailsham and never heard of such arrangement, and even after one of the guardians, Miss Lucy, tells them the whole truth about donations in order to challenge the students' delusions about their futures (80-81). Thus, even though her experiences prove the contrary, Kathy might still be holding on to this last hope offered by storytelling. In contrast to Goh's claims that the protagonists' struggle is one towards truth (2011, 60) and to Tommy and Kathy's similar claims (Ishiguro 2005, 79), the perspective sustained here is that they fight to defend their fantasies. Moreover, just as Scheherazade can never be sure if her sentence would finally be carried out in spite of her artistry, so Kathy might have begun the narration with

only a faint gleam of hope. What is stressed in both characters is the significance of the attempt, the narrative process, rather than its outcome. It is precisely Kathy's impending death that contributes the most to her art since, as Benjamin affirms, storytelling is intimately connected with the reflection upon eternity caused by direct contact with death ([1955] 1968, 93), as the essence of life within the story assumes "transmissible form at the moment of [the storyteller's] death" (94).

Concerning the narration's purpose, two hypotheses can be envisioned depending on the roles assigned to Kathy and her listener. We can consider the narrative a recording addressed to a clone, as in the case of a carer who finds a cassette in the glove compartment of his/her car containing a recording of his/her predecessor's story. Such a scheme would enable Kathy to live on in another's consciousness, overcoming the short life span and the meaninglessness of a clone's existence each time the recording is played. In addition, as she might have found respite in storytelling from the alienation and the un-belongingness that the life of a carer entails—driving through England's deserted byroads from recovery centre to recovery centre, from donor to donor—her audience might also find comfort and entertainment during their journeys. This reflects Benjamin's description of storytelling as "the art of repeating stories" and its essential memorisation in the "boredom" and self-forgetfulness of work routine (91). A message of such characteristics would also serve for didactic purposes, offering answers to the clones' existential questions, teaching them through exemplars, just as Scheherazade did with the sultan (Karahasan 2002, 64; quoted in Enderwitz 2004, 195-196). As such, it fulfills another of Benjamin's characteristics: the transmission of wisdom ([1955] 1968, 86-87). This scenario, however, increases the dystopian setting's hopelessness since Kathy's listener would also be sentenced to die. The second possibility results from the previously mentioned interpretation of Kathy's account as part of her job, recounting her experiences as a Hailsham student to comfort her donors and allow them to partake, albeit vicariously, in the life of that mythical utopia that Hailsham represents to clones. This alternative option regards Kathy's storytelling as triggered and maintained not only for her own survival but for the welfare of the clones in her charge. Thanks to the aforementioned unchronological and digressive structure of the account, she is able to prolong the story, making her listener curious and desirous of hearing it in its entirety. By doing so, she gives her donors something to live for, making them want to survive at least for another day, and to recover from the donations faster so as to be able to receive her visits. Similarly, by following Kathy's example, they would remain calmer thanks to the enjoyment of the fantasies she offers and to their acceptance of their fate as clones, even after learning the truth about Hailsham.

In spite of her efforts and accomplishments, Kathy ultimately fails to become Scheherazade since there is no clemency or final pardon for her. Despite her profitableness as a good carer, she has to comply with and complete the role imposed on every clone by society. In fact, this impossibility springs from her only evident difference as a

clone, a genetic modification related to sexuality. In one of Kathy's narrated memories, Hailsham's students wonder why guardians show a contradictory attitude towards sex; one of them asserts that for guardians "sex was for when you wanted babies" (Ishiguro 2005, 94). The students are puzzled by the adults' concern with sex, since they are biologically unable to have children. This connection between sexuality, reproduction and their identity as clones is reinforced by one of Kathy's classmates, who believes that it is the guardians' duty to promote sex so that their organs could function properly and they could become "good donors" (94). Despite its apparent insignificance, the barrenness of clones gains importance when analysed in relation to a fact that is usually forgotten in popular knowledge of the *Arabian Nights*, most probably due to its numerous variants and editions (Ballaster 2013, 49). In most versions her final pardon and the sultan's repentance is not only brought about by storytelling but by the three children that Scheherazade has with him (*Nights* 10, 54-55). Based on Heinz and Sofia Grotzfeld's conclusions (1984), Susanne Enderwitz argues that motherhood as the motivation of the pardon may be closer to the original sources of the *Nights*, underlining the relationship between "the telling of stories and giving birth (as two parallel acts of procreation)" (2004, 190-191). That Kathy would finally die because of her imposed sterility would stress the significance of one scene in particular. Kathy narrates that, as a child, when she was listening to her Judy Bridgewater tape alone in her room she was being observed by Madame (Ishiguro 2005, 70-73). As she remarks, though Bridgewater's song "Never Let Me Go" talks about a romance, she was imagining herself to be holding her own baby, a scene that brought Madame to tears before a perplexed Kathy. Although later on Madame explains her own interpretation of the scene (267), it is not enough to dispel the connection between Kathy's destiny and her barrenness.

Commenting on Benjamin's relation between Kafka and Scheherazade, Stephanie Jones adds that such a connection can be established "in the use of suspension and deferral to both comprehend and challenge the threat of a mad and maddening rule" (Jones 2005, 118). If not to save others or to be saved, storytelling still provides Kathy with the means to transmit to others her own discoveries and understanding of her reality. Although in Kathy's attitude we see more acceptance than resistance, her account defies the prevailing order by calling into question the differences between humans and clones and by creating a sense of community, a common narrative. Given that storytelling seems a common activity for clones judging from Kathy's remarks about the tales narrated by veterans of their travels (Jones 2005, 41), she replicates this by gathering some of these fictions and incorporates them into her own account. Stories from their childhood like the Gallery, which the protagonists eventually connect to the rumour of deferrals,<sup>5</sup> Norfolk as England's "lost corner" (Ishiguro

<sup>5</sup> This connection is based on the idea that the Gallery's purpose was to find and prove that clones have a soul (Ishiguro 2005, 173). Although Miss Emily eventually discloses that the students' creations were collected for fundraisers (249), in their minds, however, art defines humanity. Leaving aside the truth of such

2005, 65-66) and Hailsham's grounds and nearby forest have shaped the collective mind of the students as much as their individual understanding of their lives. In other words, these tales have become archetypal in the sense that these constitute the foundations of the narrative the clones create out of their experiences, their memory and sense of existence. These anecdotes constitute the politics of belonging of Hailsham's community, the strategies adopted to create a communal identity and delimit it in opposition to the identity of other groups (Yuval-Davis 2006, 204). Although Kathy's account shows a remarkable division in this society—between Hailsham students and the rest of the clones, between those who want to “remember” an imagined Hailsham and those who indeed do remember their actual experience there—and is epitomised by Kathy's endogamous behaviour (Ishiguro 2005, 4, 118, 122), it is clear that there is an eagerness to participate in the narratives of other groups. Just as Kathy and Ruth are ready to accept the rumours of deferrals (152), so Kathy's donors/carers would love to accept and adopt her own stories. In addition to the tales about Hailsham students, Kathy also incorporates those related by the veterans in the Cottages, like Steve's porn magazines (130) or the deferrals for Hailsham couples, the latter intimately connected with the school's mythologisation.

#### 4. THE TALES OF HOME

Hailsham was a project initiated by people who, like Miss Emily, wanted to prove that “if [clone] students were reared in humane, cultivated environments,” they could become “as sensitive and intelligent as human beings” (Ishiguro 2005, 256). It is not a surprise then that for clones raised in the deplorable conditions of other centres (260), Hailsham would represent a sort of utopia, a place of infinite possibilities where all rumours and fantasies are a reality (143). But this mythical quality is also at work for the students raised at Hailsham, judging from the protagonists' desire to believe in deferrals even though no such thing was ever mentioned in the school—a quality emphasised after its closure. In that sense, Kathy's account and, thus, the novel, follows the tradition of science fiction in which every sentient being aspires to find a better condition of existence. If that is the case, then the reality of Hailsham might be compromised. This idea is reinforced by the nature of the reality depicted, which Freeman deems “a world whose contours we must infer, rather than witness, which gives it an ominous cast” (2008, 196). The manner in which the school's environs are depicted, a “hollow” from which cars could rarely be seen (Ishiguro 2005, 34)—implying the difficulty in seeing the surroundings, or of being noticed from them—increases the mystery and fantasy of the place. The

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a claim, this idea may be founded upon the wrong premise: that art reflects the artist's self. According to Oscar Wilde, art's aim is to “conceal the artist,” and he goes on to say that “[i]t is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors” ([1891] 2001, 3). It thus seems that what is being questioned is not the humanity and soul of clones but of the artworks' spectators, humans.

stories of Hailsham's forest represent the school in terms of a bounded Paradise. Used as a direct punishment for those who break the rules (50-68) and as a deterrent and didactic admonishment, they become archetypal for Kathy's *nostos*. In one of Kathy's stories, a student left the school's boundaries and was not allowed in by the guardians when she tried to return, thus being forced to wander outside the fence until she died in the outer world, continuing her vagrancy as a spirit "gazing over Hailsham, pining to be let back in" (50). In such an illusory portrayal, the forest draws the limits of the illusion since it appears that nothing else is constructed beyond them, acting as a metaphorical barrier, in addition to the actual fence, that secludes a paradise to which there is no possible return after one departs.

To claim the inexistence of Hailsham would be perhaps going too far, yet if the mythical and fantastic qualities that characterise the school are not a result of its unreality, then they must be the outcome of the narrator's nostalgic rendering. According to Boym, nostalgic thought "desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology," which, in its confusion between the real and the imagined home and when taken to the extreme, "can create a phantom homeland, for the sake of which one is ready to die or kill" (2001, xvi). Under this perspective, Kathy takes the reality of an institution and place called Hailsham and transforms it into a childhood utopia where everybody would have loved to live and grow up, including its creator herself. Kathy, like any other clone, can use this fantastic narrative to cope with, and even welcome, her bleak future by linking her donation period to the possibility of recreating and reliving her own invention, as she herself remarks. The understanding of the narration as Kathy's personal fiction is emphasised on two dimensions. The representation of memory throughout the novel as a process that can be consciously ordered (Ishiguro 2005, 37) and controlled: "Maybe she [Ruth] was determined to remember us all as more sophisticated than we were" (18). This is also seen in the combination of Kathy's astonishing capacity to accurately recall past events (7) with her doubt and uncertainty over the veracity of her remembrances (8, 13, 56, 76, 77, 87). In addition, the fact that she is unable to find Hailsham's location in the relatively small geographic space of Great Britain and, especially, that she neither recognises Hailsham in Miss Emily's watercolour painting or is recognised by one of Hailsham's students (100), suggests that perhaps Kathy was not in fact a student but one of the unlucky ones that wishes to *remember* Hailsham. That is, through the best remembrances and moments of each of her donors, collected during her eleven years as a carer, she would be able to construct a utopic vision of a place called home.

However, due to the difficulty of defending such a claim beyond the aforementioned premises, another option might be studied in relation to collective memory through which we can reconcile these diverse perspectives. The novel shows memory's process of fictional reconstruction in the episode of the Walkman craze. In it, Kathy recalls that the students used to listen to music together, sharing the same device, passing it



from one to another after twenty seconds. She affirms that “after a while, provided you kept the same tape going over and over, it was surprising how close it was to having heard all of it by yourself” (Ishiguro 2005, 100-101). Considering this remark with the dimension of agreement that memory has, like when Tommy accepts Kathy’s corrections concerning their ages in a particular memory (38), we can understand the Hailsham of Kathy’s account as the reconstructed collection of all the stories, memories and perspectives of the clone community about it, regardless of whether the individuals were students there or not. What is proposed here is not that the school does not exist or that Kathy was not a student, but that her remembrance and rendition of the place and of her childhood are heavily influenced by, and incorporate, the collective representation of Hailsham. If Scheherazade embodies the sedentary collector of stories in Benjamin’s description of the storyteller ([1955] 1968, 84-85), Kathy constitutes its counterpart, the traveller who collects tales from the experiences of others as well as her own. By weaving together her own remembrances as Hailsham student and the rumours and fantasies of others, she envelops her life and school within the realm of the myth, transforming the subjective and transient into the permanent as the narration is included within the collective memory and mythology of the clone community and its archetypes. Her account in this way can be read as the confluence of narratives described by Brah through which the identity of a community and of the individual within it are constructed (1996, 182-183). The success of Kathy’s account resides not in her own survival but in integrating that confluence of narratives within human culture. By resorting to the narrative formulas, tropes and motifs offered in works like the *Odyssey* or the *Arabian Nights*, she allows clones to assert a common tradition that can be traced back to an ancient and mythical cultural heritage to which they belong both as members and as victims. This idea reflects Ishiguro’s claims concerning the novel’s premise from a cultural perspective, which he acknowledges to have used as a “metaphor for how we all live,” adding that clones “face the same questions we all face” (Freeman 2008, 197).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Although at the end the dystopian setting prevents Kathy from fulfilling the roles of her literary precursors in exact terms, she adapts their archetypes to her own context, embodying both Scheherazade and Odysseus in an account that shows how memory, fiction and the formation and reassertion of individual and communal identity are woven together. Though unable to postpone and resist her imposed fate like Scheherazade did, Kathy embraces storytelling as a way to inspire, comfort and amuse through nostalgic remembrance and fantasy. The interconnection between these two elements allows her to override spatial and temporal limitations, being able to return, albeit artificially, to her cherished innocent childhood and her home. However, because of the very essence of memory and idealisation, and the instability of the concept of



home, as suggested in the *Odyssey*, she is unable to complete her homecoming. Instead, she travels to a location belonging to the realm of the myth, one that incorporates the narratives embroidered within the identity of the clone community. Hailsham and other fictions offer dehumanised individuals like Kathy and her listeners the opportunity to overcome rootlessness and isolation through the reassertion of their belonging to a community joined by its common experiences and stories. The tales Kathy passes on are not only created based on their particular experiences as clones but, as Kathy shows, depend on and coexist with a tradition that precedes them, offering narrative patterns through which they can encode and understand both fiction and reality. Texts like the *Odyssey* or the *Arabian Nights / One Thousand and One Nights* offer Kathy a device through which to understand her existence and articulate the narrative of her life and of her community, a mechanism that helps her to cope with her reality as well as allowing her to teach and comfort those in her care.

In the three texts explored here, narrative, in connivance with memory, becomes a mechanism of adaptation, used by Odysseus in the creation of different identities, and of resistance as demonstrated by Scheherazade and Dunyazad. These texts, and the literary traditions they belong to, grant us the comfort of knowing that in the meaninglessness and finitude of existence we still belong to something beyond ourselves. Regardless of the veracity or fantasy of Kathy's account, Ishiguro succeeds by leading us to see her as one of us, or to see us as one of them. Through a process of sympathetic identification the text strives to make us realise that in truth clones are the result of our social values, ideologies and cultures; they belong to us. The certainty of the success of Kathy's *nostos* eludes asseveration due to the novel's bleak ending. Yet by understanding her personal *nostos* through the intertextual connections proposed, we are led to believe that hers is the journey of a global community, one in which home is not a physical destination but a psychological and narrative construct that can be found in and through storytelling.

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