

**“I LOST RUTH, THEN I LOST TOMMY, BUT I WON’T LOSE MY
MEMORIES OF THEM.” (NEVER LET ME GO)
COMPARE HOW *STASILAND* AND *NEVER LET ME GO* PORTRAY
INDIVIDUALS COPING WITH LOSS.**

The grief of loss can be mended through both actions and remembrance, as John Banville states, “the past beats inside me like a second heart”. Inspired by the social context of the fast-moving development of biological and medical sciences in the early 21st century, Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go* (NLMG), explores the difficulties of coping with the loss of through the characterisation of clones who are shunned by society. Conversely, Anna Funder’s memoir style novel *Stasiland* is instead inspired by the historical fall of the Berlin Wall, delineating a country ravaged by Hitler’s dictatorship attempting to cope with the loss they have endured. Both texts reveal memory as a tool used by characters to reminisce about loved ones lost. Furthermore, both authors also delineate the coping of loss through both fictional and non-fictional settings. However, whilst *Stasiland* illustrates hope for a better future in the face of immense loss, NLMG, displays the helplessness of clones in the face of the English government.

Both texts portray memory as a mechanism to cope with losing loved ones. Throughout *Stasiland* this notion is evident through characters such as Miriam Webber, who’s husband was murdered by the Stasi, as she still holds onto vivid memories of his death: “I could still see his head injuries...” Webber maintains these memories not only to grieve for her lost husband but to also seek retribution and the truth behind his murder, this is her method of coping with the loss of her husband. Funder’s interview style of narration further accentuates the healing properties of memory as it delves into multiple pasts and unveils that whilst some choose to confront the painful experience of loss, others prefer to avoid it completely as Uwe claims, it’s “sort of ... embarrassing”. Thus, readers are confronted with a multitude of ways in which memory can help cope with loss. Additionally, Funder reveals that after the collapse of the Berlin wall East Germans attempted to disassociate themselves with Hitler and communism as a whole, attempting to force both themselves and the rest of the world to forget about Hitler’s reign. In a similar vein, Ishiguro’s portrayal of the crucial role of memory in coping with loss is epitomised through the character of Kathy. She not only endures the loss of her friends Ruth and Tommy through the perseverance of their memories: “if I’d wait long enough ... I’d see it was Tommy”, but also the loss of her freedom. She does so by reminiscing upon her youthful days at Hailsham, “Ruth and I often found ourselves remembering these things”. Furthermore, the donor’s constant requests for stories highlights the consolatory nature of memories to confront his imminent loss of life. Additionally, the first person narration style of NLMG places focus upon only Kathy’s methods to cope with loss as we are only privy to her thoughts. Through characterisation, both novels outline the different ways in which characters cope with the loss of loved ones.

Additionally, both NLMG and *Stasiland* use setting to portray those coping with loss. Funder illustrates a non-fictional setting where she delineates the struggles of the East Berlin people. This non-fictional setting coupled with the interview style narration places emphasis on the reality of the struggles of the East Berlin people. Thus, not only challenging readers to consider the ways in which they would cope with loss, but also allowing them to relate closely with the methods of coping which characters in the novel employ. Furthermore, the fall of the Berlin Wall and Facist rule of Hitler contextualises the

suffering of the people of East Berlin, lending readers a greater understanding as to why some would choose to forget, suppress and “sweep it under the rug.” Additionally, the interview style of narration highlights each interviewee’s individuality in how they cope with loss but also unveils that “memory .. is unreliable” as each person alters and moulds their own memory in order to cope with the painful experiences of loss. Similarly, Ishiguro’s setting aids in the portrayal of those coping with loss. The fictional and dystopian setting of post world war two England allow for the struggles of the clones to be emphasised as they become the centerpiece of the novel. Furthermore, the implementation of cloning for the sole purpose of organ harvesting ensures that the clones have no one to turn to in times of suffering and force them to find their identities with their own memories. As a result, the clones of NLMG repeatedly turn to their past to cope with the loss of loved ones. In a similar vein to Funder, Ishiguro also emphasises the malleability of memory when coping with loss when Kathy claims “maybe I’m remembering wrong”, highlighting how when society strives to forget and keep the clones “in the shadows”, personal memories can still be used to console. Thus, both Stasiland and NLMG utilise settings to portray individuals coping with loss.

On the other hand, whilst Stasiland depicts hope as a mechanism to cope with loss, NLMG delineates the certainty of death for all clones. Stasiland illustrates in NLMG hope after immense loss through it’s characterisation of minor characters such as the elderly woman Funder meets at Alexanderplatz station. She has lived through East Germany and hopes to one day visit “Bali ... Or China”, this interaction brings to light that although East Germany still lives on in the minds of the German population, they still hope and dream of a better world where they are truly free and are able to forget about the losses they have endured. Furthermore, the conversion of Stasi headquarters into a museum is indicative of confining the Stasi to the past, never to be seen again, **symbolic actions** such as these radiate hope for citizens who “never in their lives” would have thought Stasi headquarters would be turned into a museum. Not only is there hope for a better future for those subjected to Hitler's rule but also within those who lost their lives work after the fall of the GDR. Members of Stasi such as Herr Winz, who when questioned, would often return to the “beauties of socialist theory” in hopes to “sow the seeds of socialism in an untainted corner of the world.”

Antithetically, NLMG highlights the helplessness of clones who are destined to die. Such tragedy is epitomised through Kathy’s last words, “turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever I was supposed to be”, she no longer has free will however accepts her imminent fate of death, following orders until the day she becomes a donor. Different to Stasiland, the **characterization** of clones who have their lives predetermined mould the way in which the clones deal with loss, most notably, the loss of loved ones. Whilst the characters of Stasiland can be seen to seek justice and retribution, those in NLMG have accepted their fates and chose the path of least resistance to cope with the loss of autonomy. Furthermore, the clones seek reassurance from myths and rumors such as the “deferral”, however even in these small glimpses of hope they are only trying to delay the inevitable as they are unable to truly break free from their predetermined lives. Ultimately, whilst Stasiland explores hope as a mechanism to cope with loss, NLMG delineates acceptance as an alternate method to confront loss.

In their portrayals of individuals coping with loss, both *Stasiland* and *NLNG* unveil the crucial role of memory in accepting the past and moving on. Additionally, both novels also employ setting to aid with the portrayal of loss. Ultimately, Ishiguro's exploration of the desire to cling to memories of the past contributes to the more insightful interpretation of the avoidance of painful memories in *Stasiland*. At the same time, Funders intricate portrayal of hope within society which stems from those who are coping with loss facilitates a better understanding of the suppression and control of clones in *NLNG*.