

Narratives Of Evasion, Repression And Trauma In The Buried Giant

¹V. MAHALAKSHMI , ²Dr. D. SHANMUGAM

¹Ph. D Research scholar, Department of English
Annamalai University.

²Research Supervisor, Professor and Head, Department of English
Annamalai University.

ABSTRACT

Kazuo Ishiguro is a well-known author, and his award-winning works inspire deep introspection into moral dilemmas and the human mind. The article delineates with how Ishiguro weaves a tapestry of narratives that delves into themes of evasion, repression, and trauma. And also it examines the numerous ways in which Ishiguro's narratives progress. Since avoidance is a subtle way to hint at what is hidden below the surface, this paper will focus on the different ways how the narrators try to avoid blame, pain, and trauma. Also, explain the length about the theoretical aspects of trauma and repression as complicated psychological patterns of turning away from blame or pain, moving it to another place or time, making it an object, and facing it through substitution. Ishiguro depicts these people as experiencing a wide range of problems, including a generation gap, a decline in professional reputation, the loss of a glory once enjoyed, childhood trauma, isolation from the present, and a profound yearning for the past. It examines how these strategies affect interpersonal dynamics and hinder the process of reconciliation. Ultimately, the story becomes an exploration of the human experience, where the journey towards self-discovery is often a treacherous one, rife with challenges that must be overcome if one hopes to find peace and closure.

Keywords: trauma, forgetting, past, memory, postwar, self-discovery.

Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* is a captivating novel that delves deep into the realms of evasion, repression, and trauma. He

masterfully weaves together these themes, creating a thought-provoking exploration of memory, love, and the consequences of collective forgetting. This literary masterpiece showcases Ishiguro's exceptional storytelling abilities and his knack for intertwining historical events with profound emotional exploration.

The plot of the novel is a journey of Axl and Beatrice, an old Briton couple, to their Son who they suddenly recollect on their memory that they have lost. Since they inhabit a world surrounded by a fog of forgetfulness, they are somewhat uncertain about the location of their son's village, but Beatrice thinks she might locate it because she gets some clues while she recollecting her memory and takes the lead to the journey to search for her son. As the journey unfolds, Axl and Beatrice are forced to confront their own past traumas, as well as the larger traumas that have plagued their land and its inhabitants.

The couples are an extremely loving and mutually caring with each other, and they undertake the long, arduous journey, meeting a boatman who insists that the ferries couples together who remember their past, answer his queries satisfactorily and prove their mutual love and devotion. Repression becomes a defining element of their relationship, as they struggle to remember their shared past and the extent of their love for one another.

They trudge along through a Saxon village in search of a medicine woman for treatment of pain in her back. There they witness the growing tension of people on account of the attack of an Ogre. There they found a group of men and a boy, who is rescued from the Ogres but shunned by the Pagan villagers because the wound he received from the Ogres might turn him into a fiend. So, the couple, Wistan and Saxon warrior, escort him to the Christian village where Axl and Beatrice son supposedly lives.

Evasion, in the context of literature, refers to the deliberate act of avoiding or diverting attention from painful or uncomfortable truths. In *The Buried Giant*, Ishiguro employs this narrative technique to explore the characters' attempts to escape the painful memories of a once war-torn land. Ishiguro skillfully portrays evasion as a double-edged sword in the novel. While it provides temporary respite from the harsh realities, it also perpetuates a cycle of repression, hindering personal growth and healing. The characters' evasion ultimately prevents them from

fully addressing their traumas and inhibits their ability to forge genuine connections with others. The characters, Axl and Beatrice, embark on a perilous journey in a post-Arthurian Britain, where a mysterious mist has clouded the memories of its inhabitants. As Axl and Beatrice traverse the treacherous landscapes of a war-torn Britain, they encounter characters who are haunted by their own evasions, trapped in repression and denial. This collective evasion of the past serves as a metaphor for societies that repress their traumatic histories in an effort to move forward.

Repression, another key theme in the novel, is portrayed through the characters' desperate attempts to bury their pasts and shield themselves from the harsh realities of the world. Ishiguro's exquisite prose immerses readers in the characters' internal struggles, as they encounter with their own suppressed memories, fears, and desires. The layers of repression gradually peel away, revealing the profound impact it has on the characters' lives and their relationships with one another. Ishiguro skillfully explores the consequences of such repression, highlighting the inherent dangers of forgetting and the ethical dilemmas that arise when confronting suppressed memories. Their repressed memories not only hinder their personal connection but also affect their interactions with other characters they encounter along their quest. The impact of repression is evident in their encounters with Sir Gawain, the aged knight, and Wistan, the warrior. Each character carries his own burden of repressed memories and trauma, resulting in strained relationships and a constant battle between trust and suspicion.

Repression, as depicted in the character of Axl and his selective memory, symbolizes the dangers of forgetting or intentionally forgetting history. It raises questions about the ethical implications of collective forgetfulness and the potential consequences it may have on future generations. Ishiguro prompts readers to reflect on the necessity of confronting uncomfortable truths instead of perpetuating cycles of ignorance and denial. Throughout the novel, the characters grapple with the consequences of their repressed memories. They are haunted by fragments of the past that surface unexpectedly, causing confusion, fear, and a sense of unease. As they journey through the treacherous landscape, their suppressed memories begin to resurface, revealing the traumas and secrets they have long tried to bury. This unearthing of the buried past forces them to confront

their own actions, the consequences of their choices, and the impact it has had on their relationships and the world around them.

Novels rooted in trauma feature narrators who vividly depict their inner and outer worlds. These narrators articulate their internal journey using psychological terminology, like introspection, within a reflective book where characters acknowledge the narrator's perspective. Traumatic events challenge fundamental beliefs, eroding the connection between self and others. The character's identity and the importance of the painful experience are molded by their personal and cultural history embedded in the landscapes they encounter.

Surprisingly, trauma is inherently ethical, societal, constitutional, and ancient in nature. It isn't limited to the realm of psychological research alone; instead, it naturally extends its influence to various fields of study, showcasing its interdisciplinary character and the profound impact it has on these disciplines. Traumatic experiences stem from specific events, molding characters' perceptions and empathy. Moreover, psychoanalytic trauma encompasses highly destructive sequences. In essence, past traumas and painful memories leave an imprint on the characters' psyches. Stress arises from confusion and insecurity, with common sources of psychological trauma including sexual exploitation, workplace injustice, police brutality, bullying, family violence, and unique adolescent encounters. Like a modern-day enigma, trauma assumes a multitude of roles. It initiates a transformative journey, representing the path of adversity and suffering that ultimately leads to enlightenment and wisdom.

Traumatisation and survival are two sides of the same coin; no one is unique in this regard, and their possibilities are limitless in the life of every human. Kazuo Ishiguro on survival says that "I'm not at all interested in the brave who fight against the odds and win. I am interested in those who accept their lot, as that is what many people in the world are doing." (Lewis 98)

Contemporary narratives are a type of rational fiction that delves into fundamental themes like community eccentricities, sexuality, nostalgia, antiquity, post-imperialism, urban traditions, and codes of behavior. Their primary goal is to offer readers a window into everyday life by employing reasonable imagination

and a commitment to realism, thereby emphasizing the portrayal of daily challenges and suffering. Among the diverse array of renowned contemporary British authors, Ishiguro stands out, lauded by the Swedish Academy for creating emotionally engaging worlds that reveal the gap between an individual's illusory sense of connection to the world. Consequently, trauma assumes a more significant role in narratives, as life is a constant mix of highs and lows.

Regarding trauma and literature, it characterizes a novel as an exploration of the self and others, encompassing both fiction and nonfiction, within a context of disruption. This disruption showcases how traumatized individuals convey their stories through distinct techniques, dialogues, and the interpersonal distance they maintain. In society, traumatic events bring about pain and suffering while also yielding fresh insights. When it comes to articulating aspects of human experience that elude conventional forms of communication and transcend human understanding, literature emerges as a potent tool.

It's reasonable to recognize people as social beings engaged in various aspects of the world. Individuals possess the ability to shape a world that can be either harmonious or oppressive. Importantly, trauma isn't always detrimental and often resembles a transformative shift in one's perspective on personal growth. This evolution encompasses a series of changes, commencing with trauma, enduring through perseverance and suffering, and culminating in wisdom and understanding. This analytical approach allows trauma-based novels to connect empathetically with their readers.

At its core, trauma begins as an indescribable or unsolvable situation in a person's life. Over time, it finds its place in literature, becoming the wound that literature reads. Just as a work of art is considered such when it conceals another work of art, in every traumatic novel, a process of re-traumatization occurs as the author conveys the trauma to the reader, fostering the ultimate consciousness that any work of art can provoke. Trauma represents an individual's emotional response to a tragic event, embodying the psychic sense of loss experienced by each human being.

The trauma based novel demonstrates how a traumatic event disrupts attachments between self and others by challenging fundamental

assumptions about moral laws and social relationships that are themselves connected to specific environments. Novels represent this disruption between the self and others by carefully describing the place of trauma because the physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories imbedded in landscapes that define the character's identity and the meaning of the traumatic experience. The primacy of place in the representations of trauma anchors the individual experience within a larger cultural context and, in fact, organises the memory and meaning of trauma. (Balaev 1)

Therefore, any traumatic event characterized by an overwhelming amount and degree of suffering, which defies comprehension and the ability to incorporate it into one's worldview, becomes a source of emotional, cognitive, and psychological distress.

Moreover, every trauma-based novel evokes the reader's emotional sensitivity and guides them towards a deeper understanding. Experiencing extreme events doesn't erase cognitive functions but rather places readers in a new relationship with the harrowing narratives in the text. In essence, it's the profound "unemotional recognition" that reignites the reader's natural inclination to search for a comprehensive explanation of trauma, transcending mere biological or metapsychological aspects. In this way, each trauma-based novel acts as a testament to and representation of the human condition, offering an opportunity to convey the concrete details of events to those who haven't personally undergone the trauma.

The first time the giant's grave is mentioned in the story is when Axl and Beatrice are just starting out on their journey and decide to avoid the hill where the giant is buried in favor of a longer one. Axl and Beatrice, the novel's protagonists, are a married couple, and their relationship is symbolic of *The Buried Giant*.

Though each of them felt guilty of "the darker betrayal" and the small infidelity, and were shy of revealing the secret of their past or did not dare to relieve the past, still the situation compelled them to confess and reveal before the boatman to individually be

naked and open selves, confronting the truth at any cost. Thus, the deep-seated shock and suffering of losing one another created a trauma which they cannot escape till the end. Their son, the only eye-witness to the small moment of unfaithfulness of his mother (Beatrice) and consequent bitterness that enveloped his loving parents; “left vowing never to return” (356). His (their son’s) leaving absence intensified their trauma. However, on the spur of the moment, Axl and Beatrice set out on their journey to the son’s village. Due to Querig’s spell, they forgot all their past, Beatrice proposes to set out on a visit to the son. The readers and the narrate can clearly understand the pull of filial attraction and the emotional need to see the son, although not without a sense of unease:

A journey we must go on and no more delay... A journey to our son’s village.

It’s not far. In his town, our son is waiting for us. How much longer are we

going to make him wait? We might go on such a trip, certainly, princess,

we we’ll think about such a journey. But why do you say it’s my wishes always

stood in the way of it? (20)

As is apparent, beneath the placid conjugal affection and endearments there is an undercurrent of conflict. The trip to the son town, which is revealed to be his burial only at the end of the tale, it is revealed towards the end of the novel that Axl and Beatrice’s son was killed by them in a tragic accident. The couple had been under the influence of the dragon Querig’s breath, which caused them to forget the details of what happened. As the mist of forgetfulness begins to lift, they remember the truth about their son’s fate, and this realization contributes to the bittersweet ending of the story. It also shown to be a symbolic fulfilment of Beatrice’s long-held desire to see her son’s grave tomb. Therefore, there is a sense of hesitation on the part of Axl, once the matter has been broached by Beatrice. Since trauma involves displacement of the ordinary shock and pain by a surrogate one and deferred as well as delayed response to the surrogate. The couple’s quest for son serves as a distraction from their dread and experience of losing each other, and hence as a trauma of loss.

Trauma, both personal and collective, permeates the narrative, leaving an indelible mark on the characters and the society they inhabit. Ishiguro sensitively explores the long-lasting effects of war, conflict, and loss on individuals and communities, shedding light on the complexities of healing and reconciliation. Ishiguro delves into the psychological and emotional wounds inflicted by war, loss, and personal tragedies. The characters' encounters with various individuals, each representing different aspects of trauma, reveal the lasting impact of past events on individuals and societies as a whole.

Wistan can get information about the past from things that don't seem to tell a story, and he believes in digging into the past debris, while Sir Gawain advocates to derive contentment in living the present. Wistan stands for the hope that the source of trauma and violence may be uncovered; he is determined to use the clues left behind by the apocalypse to piece together what happened and why it matters now. Wistan, for instance, sees terrible vestiges of the past that not even the holy monks can explain away from the tranquil, lovely monastery they call home "the monks hardly know what they pass each day" (163).

Somewhat neutralizes the viciousness of the past battles and atrocities in terms pertaining to the natural cycle of existence and mortality. Therefore, he urges Wistan to refrain from dredging up the past and disrupt the placid and serene peace of the misty territory and leave Querig alone: "Look, how she clings to life, sir! Be merciful and leave this place. Leave this country to rest in forgetfulness" (327).

Apart from the dynamics of forgetting and remembering as the central processes of trauma. The Buried Giant also deploys silence to signify areas of gaps, repression and amnesia underlying the pervasive peace, placidity and misty serenity. The quietude that pervades the burial ground, and the bones and skeletons that lie scattered in the dark underground passage take back the reader to the story of the Post-Arthurian Britain of the 5th and 6th BC, the period in history shrouded in the mist of uncertainty. The victory of the Britons; the defeat and suppression of the Saxons followed by ethnic cleansing or genocide could not secure peace, love and trust. Rather it inculcated hatred an ancestral hatred that Wistan insisted upon Edwin to sincerely perform "a duty to hate all Britons" (344). The seeming political stability and peace that Arthur

and his followers engineered under the spell of Merlin by employing the she dragon(Querig) could not last long. It was ephemeral as characters like Wistan could challenge the operation of Querig's spell on them and he is determined to spread hatred among his Saxon cousins and avenge the wrongs suffered on the Britons at any cost.

Taken as a whole the trauma, evasion and repression in the narratives of Ishiguro become fraught because the reader feels provoked to dig into the hidden and suppressed territory for greater revelations than just being complacent and contented with the narrator's narration on the surface. Ishiguro purposefully ends the novel by introducing Axl and Beatrice with a boatman. Since they have seen the boatman earlier and by reposing faith on his words, they have undergone suffering both physical and mental, it takes a long time for them to trust his words and activities. Though sympathizing with the frail and emaciated, Beatrice the boatman comes forward to lift her with care to a secured place, the old man (Axl) dreads seeing his wife in the company of an unknown man. Indeed, the boatman could realise the trauma in Axl and thought not to intrude on their privacy and intimacy.

Once Axl had realized the pain of losing Beatrice with the intrusion of an outsider and the consequent separation of the son, he no more dares to take the risk of losing her again. Hence his fearful and suspicious eyes now doubt anybody who ventures an entry in their private space, however benevolent and friendly their intention may be. Equally sick and possessive is Beatrice for her husband. She cannot withstand a moment's separation from him at whatever cost. She is ardent enough to secure the 'bond' everywhere and anywhere they go. Possibly, she was terribly wounded by the vision of separation. Therefore, she always talks of walking arm in arm in the journey of life. She reminisces to see and speak. "You were gone leaving me in a lonely bed" (285).

The boatman apparently appreciates how strong the bonding of mutual love and devotion between the couple is. It is indeed very difficult to win confidence. But eventually he succeeds to woo Beatrice by showing her a possibility of reaching her son. The boatman here seems to be a modified version of Charon, the ferryman in Hades, according to the Greek mythology, who rows people across the rivers, namely Styx and Lethe that divide the living from the dead. He may as well be Manannan (Irish

mythology). Whatever be the origin, the modification has been largely in Christian terms because he enjoins upon the couple the Christian ideals of conjugality such as absolute loyalty, and also acts as the confessor to give the couple a chance to confess the guilt of their betrayal of each other before being carried over to the other side of the river: the realm of death. The fictional virtuosity of Ishiguro lies in his integrating personal guilt with collective guilt. The impersonality of disembodied, collective guilt of a people on account of their atrocities on another people cannot be concretized unless it is felt at the individual level. In this novel, Axl and Beatrice, who play out their own domestic story of the attempt at retrieving the memories of the personal guilt of small betrayals, are drawn into the larger story of Wistan's killing Querig and Sir Gawain. Thus, the personal and collective guilt have been narrated in two separate plots linked through Axl, who turns out to be a warrior on the side of Britons, and he played a little role of betrayal at the behest of King Arthur.

Indeed, as the spell of amnesia is lifted, and the past of betrayals, bitterness and losses looms clearly large on the memories of Axl and Beatrice, with the consequence of their final separation and suffering. Trauma, as is common knowledge, results from the displacement of guilt and anxiety of suffering because both are repressed, aided by the mist of amnesia as in *The Buried Giant*.

As for Axl's guilt of the betrayal of the Saxon people, it is also mediated through the reveries of Sir Gawain, because he is implicated in it. And yet the drift of the reveries is to nullify all the charges against them and to mitigate the guilt:

A slaughterer of babes. Is that what we were that day? Of the one I escorted,

What became of her? Was she among you just now, ladies? Why gather about

Me this way as I ride to my duty?...My time will come before long... And were

he to ask questions, as some say he will, I would answer honestly, for what

I have left to hide? I had no wife... (244)

The Buried Giant seems to emphasize unequivocally the ethics of remembering and confronting one's repressed remorse so that self-restitution and redemption are possible. However, The Buried Giant sets an ambiguous tone by suggesting that suffering may be more desirable than remorse. The ethics of letting the past be the past and burying and forgetting the colossus justifies amnesia in the larger interest of maintaining peace between two communities after many years of slaughter and mayhem. Evidently, the separation of a loving couple like Axl and Beatrice lends the novel's conclusion an atmosphere of lingering melancholy and unrelenting pathos, and convinces the readers on a sentimental level that things should not have reached this point. Perhaps they would have been better off if they hadn't unearthed the metaphorical giant of dreadful remorse memories.

Furthermore, the exploration of trauma in The Buried Giant emphasizes the long-lasting effects of personal and collective wounds. Whether it is the trauma of war, betrayal, or loss, Ishiguro vividly portrays the lingering pain that can shape individuals and societies. Through his characters, he conveys the transformative power of acknowledging and addressing trauma, ultimately offering a message of hope and resilience.

In contemplating the significance of these narratives, it becomes evident that The Buried Giant serves as more than just a fantasy tale. It is a profound exploration of human nature, memory, and the pursuit of truth. Ishiguro invites readers to consider the implications of evasion, repression, and trauma in their own lives and in the broader context of history.

Ultimately, this novel reminds us of the importance of confronting our past, embracing difficult memories, and striving for reconciliation. By engaging with these narratives, readers are challenged to reflect on their own experiences and the impact of the stories one choose to bury or confront. Ishiguro's masterful storytelling leaves a lasting impression, urging the readers to acknowledge the buried giants within themselves and in the world around them.

In conclusion, exploration of the narratives of evasion, repression, and trauma in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, The Buried Giant, has shed light on the profound themes and complexities within the text. By delving into the lives of the characters and examining their struggles with memory, forgiveness, and the burdens of the past,

readers can gain a deeper understanding of the human experience and the profound impact of historical events on individual lives. Ishiguro's masterful storytelling invites readers to reflect on the power of collective memory, the consequences of forgetting, and the potential for healing, redemption, and forging a path towards a more compassionate and inclusive future.

References

- Balaev, Michelle "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory". Questia: Trusted Online Research. Mosaic(Winnipeg). 41:2. June 2008. Web. 23 Nov. 2016.
- Birke, Dorothee. *Memory's Fragile Power: Crises of Memory, Identity and Narrative in Contemporary British Novels*. Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2008. 2. Print.
- Borowska-Szerszun, Sylwia. "The Giants Beneath; Cultural memory and literature in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*." *Crossroads: A Journal of English Studies*.15.4(2016): 30-41. Print.
- Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure and Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978. 148-149. Print.
- Guo, Deyan. 'Trauma, Memory and History in K.I's Fiction'. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2 (12). 2012: 2508-2516. Print.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Buried Giant*. London: Faber and Faber, 2015. Print.
- Kiesling, Lydia. "On Forgetting; Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*." *The Millions*, March 2, 2015. Web. 17 May, 2018.
- Lewis, B. Kazuo Ishiguro. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000. Print.
- Lupack, Allan. "The Buried Giant by Kazuo Ishiguro". *Althwrana*, 25.3(Fall, 2015): 118-120. Print