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Research Article

Remembering and Unremembering: A Posthuman Reading of Memory in "The Buried Giant "

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Abstract

This paper explores the dynamics of remembering and forgetting in "The Buried Giant" through a posthuman perspective. Set in a mythical post-Arthurian Britain, the novel presents a society affected by a mysterious mist that erases collective memory. While traditional humanist approaches treat memory as an individual cognitive function central to identity, this study argues that Ishiguro portrays memory as a distributed phenomenon shaped by both human and nonhuman forces. The dragon Querig's breath, which sustains the mist, functions as a powerful nonhuman agent regulating historical consciousness and social harmony. Through the journey of Axl and Beatrice, the narrative reveals how personal relationships and emotional identities are deeply connected to suppressed histories of violence between Saxons and Britons. By situating memory within a network of environmental, mythic, and nonhuman influences, the novel challenges anthropocentric assumptions about agency and knowledge. This paper argues that *The Buried Giant* reimagines memory as a shared and unstable process, raising ethical questions about whether peace sustained through collective forgetting can truly address historical trauma and responsibility.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Posthuman theory challenges the traditional humanist belief that memory belongs solely to the individual human mind. Classical humanism assumes that identity, consciousness, and memory originate from a rational and autonomous human subject. However, posthuman thought destabilizes this notion by arguing that human experience is shaped through complex relationships with nonhuman forces, including technology, environment, animals, and material systems. In *The Buried Giant* by Kazuo Ishiguro, memory is not portrayed as a purely internal psychological process. Instead, it is externalized through the dragon's mist, a nonhuman force that controls the collective memory of the land. Through this device, the novel suggests that memory can be shaped, suppressed, and mediated by nonhuman agents, thereby aligning with the central ideas of posthuman theory.

The narrative unfolds in a mist-covered Britain where most people suffer from a strange forgetfulness. The elderly couple Axl and Beatrice, like others in the land, struggle to recall their past clearly. Their personal memories of their son, their earlier life, and their relationship remain fragmented and uncertain. Initially, this amnesia appears to be a natural condition of aging or a mysterious curse. However, as the story progresses, it becomes clear that the forgetting is not an internal cognitive failure but the result of an external force: the breath of the dragon Querig, whose mist envelops the land. The mist erases memories and prevents both individuals and communities from remembering their histories.

From a posthuman perspective, the dragon's mist functions as a nonhuman system that regulates memory. Instead of memory residing exclusively within the mind, it exists within a larger ecological and material network. The mist becomes an environmental mechanism that determines what people can remember and what they must forget. This shifts the locus of memory from the individual brain to an external nonhuman agent. The novel therefore reimagines memory as something distributed across human and nonhuman interactions rather than confined within human consciousness.

This idea resonates with key ideas in posthuman theory, particularly the concept of distributed cognition. According to posthuman thinkers, human knowledge and experience are often mediated by external systems such as technologies, environments, or biological processes. In *The Buried Giant*, the mist functions similarly to a technological or environmental system that stores and regulates collective memory. It acts as an external archive that determines the limits of human remembrance. When the mist remains, the past stays inaccessible; when it disappears, memories return. The human mind therefore becomes dependent on an external ecological condition for access to its own past.

Moreover, the mist's control over memory reveals the political dimensions of nonhuman agency. The dragon's presence is not accidental; it was deliberately preserved to maintain peace between Saxons and Britons after a violent war. By erasing the collective memory of conflict, the mist prevents resentment and revenge from resurfacing. In this sense, memory is manipulated through a nonhuman mechanism for political purposes. The dragon thus becomes an instrument through which history is

suppressed. This suggests that memory is not only biologically or psychologically produced but also politically mediated through material forces.

The novel also raises an ethical dilemma regarding the removal of the mist. If the dragon is killed and the mist disappears, the people will regain their memories of past atrocities. This restoration of memory may lead to renewed violence between communities. Conversely, maintaining the mist preserves peace but requires the suppression of historical truth. Through this conflict, the novel explores whether forgetting might sometimes be necessary for social harmony. At the same time, it demonstrates how nonhuman agents can shape moral and historical consciousness.

For Axl and Beatrice, the mist also affects intimate memory. Their love and shared history remain partially obscured, leaving them uncertain about the depth and endurance of their relationship. As fragments of memory occasionally return, they begin to question whether

their past contained moments of betrayal or sorrow. The mist therefore influences not only political history but also personal identity and emotional bonds. Memory, which traditionally defines the continuity of the self, becomes fragile and externally controlled.

Ultimately, *The Buried Giant* presents memory as something that exists beyond the boundaries of the human mind. The dragon's mist operates as a nonhuman agent that governs remembrance and forgetting across an entire society. By situating memory within an ecological and material framework, the novel challenges the humanist assumption that memory is purely internal and individual. Instead, it aligns with posthuman theory by portraying memory as distributed, mediated, and influenced by forces outside human control.

In this way, Ishiguro's novel reimagines the relationship between humans and memory. The mist reveals that memory can be shaped by nonhuman agencies that operate at environmental, political, and emotional levels. Through this narrative device, *The Buried Giant* invites readers to reconsider the nature of memory itself—not as a private mental archive but as a dynamic process shaped by interactions between human and nonhuman worlds.

In *The Buried Giant* by Kazuo Ishiguro, the mysterious mist that blankets the land suppresses the memories of past violence between Saxons and Britons. This mist is produced by the dragon Querig and causes widespread forgetfulness among the inhabitants of Britain. While the mist initially appears to be a magical element within the narrative, it also carries deeper philosophical implications. From a posthuman perspective, the mist functions as a nonhuman agent that regulates collective memory and indirectly maintains social order. By controlling what people remember and what they forget, it prevents the resurgence of resentment and revenge. Through this narrative device, the novel raises complex questions about the relationship between memory, history, and political stability.

Forgetting as a Tool for Maintaining Peace:

One of the most striking functions of the mist in the novel is its ability to erase memories of violence between Saxons and Britons. The narrative gradually reveals that the land had once

witnessed brutal conflict between these two communities. The Saxons suffered severe atrocities at the hands of the Britons under King Arthur's command. However, because the mist erases memories of these events, both groups coexist in relative calm. Without access to their historical grievances, individuals are unable to seek revenge or rekindle hatred.

In this context, forgetting becomes a mechanism for preserving peace. The mist prevents the transmission of traumatic memories from one generation to another, effectively interrupting cycles of retaliation that often emerge from historical injustice. Rather than reconciliation achieved through dialogue or justice, peace in the novel is maintained through collective amnesia. This condition creates a fragile harmony in which communities live together without remembering the reasons they once fought.

From a posthuman perspective, this situation illustrates how social stability can be shaped by nonhuman forces. The mist acts as an environmental system that governs human consciousness and social relationships. Instead of memory being controlled by individuals or historical institutions, it is regulated by a nonhuman agent that structures collective perception. The novel thus suggests that memory—and by extension political stability—can emerge from interactions between human and nonhuman forces.

The Ethical Question: Is Peace Built on Forgetting Sustainable?

Although the mist maintains peace, it raises a crucial ethical question: can a society built on forgetting truly be just or sustainable? By erasing memories of violence, the mist also erases the possibility of accountability. The victims of past atrocities are unable to remember their suffering, while the perpetrators remain free from moral responsibility. This form of enforced

forgetting prevents communities from confronting their history or acknowledging the injustice that occurred.

As the story progresses, the possibility of killing the dragon Querig—and thereby removing the mist—becomes central to the narrative. Characters such as Wistan believe that the return of memory is necessary, even if it leads to renewed conflict. According to this perspective, remembering the past is essential for justice and truth. Without memory, societies risk living in a false peace that conceals unresolved violence beneath the surface.

The novel therefore presents a moral tension between peace and truth. On one hand, forgetting protects society from the destructive consequences of hatred. On the other hand, it suppresses the moral duty to remember historical suffering. Ishiguro leaves this dilemma unresolved, forcing readers to question whether stability achieved through ignorance can ever be ethically justified.

Historical Memory and Political Stability

The mist also highlights the relationship between historical memory and political stability. In many societies, collective memory shape's national identity and influences political relationships between communities. Memories of injustice, colonization, or war often continue to influence contemporary

conflicts. By removing these memories, the mist disrupts the processes through which history informs political consciousness.

In *The Buried Giant*, the apparent harmony between Saxons and Britons exists only because the past has been erased from public awareness. Once memories begin to return, the fragile peace begins to collapse. The novel therefore suggests that political stability cannot be separated from historical memory. Forgetting may temporarily suppress conflict, but it cannot eliminate the underlying historical realities that produced it.

From a posthuman viewpoint, the mist demonstrates how nonhuman agents can shape political history. The dragon's breath operates as an environmental force that governs access to the past. Memory is not simply stored within human minds but is mediated through material and ecological systems that influence what societies remember and forget.

CONCLUSION

In *The Buried Giant*, Kazuo Ishiguro presents memory not as a fixed possession of the individual mind but as a shared and unstable phenomenon shaped by both human and nonhuman forces. Throughout the novel, memory circulates between individuals, communities, and the environment, suggesting that remembering is not solely a psychological act but a socially and materially mediated process. The dragon's mist, which suppresses the memories of the inhabitants of the land, demonstrates that memory can be shaped and controlled by external agents. From a posthuman perspective, this destabilizes the humanist assumption that memory belongs exclusively to autonomous individuals and instead frames it as distributed across networks of human and nonhuman interactions.

At the same time, *The Buried Giant* raises a profound ethical question: whether remembering is necessary for moral responsibility. The mist maintains peace by suppressing historical memory, yet it also prevents societies from acknowledging past violence and injustice. The possibility of killing the dragon and restoring memory introduces a difficult dilemma. While remembering the past may lead to renewed conflict, forgetting it allows injustice to remain unresolved. Ishiguro deliberately leaves this tension unresolved, encouraging readers to reflect on the moral implications of both remembering and forgetting.

Ultimately, the novel suggests that memory is essential for ethical responsibility, even though it carries the risk of reviving painful histories. Without memory, individuals and societies cannot confront the consequences of their actions or acknowledge the suffering of others. By

portraying memory as shared, unstable, and shaped by human and nonhuman forces, *The Buried Giant* challenges readers to reconsider the relationship between memory, justice, and political stability. The novel thus aligns with posthuman perspectives that view memory as distributed across complex networks rather than confined to the human mind.

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