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**THE QUASI-LEGEND OF KING ARTHUR *BURIED* UNDER
CORRUPTED LANDS: HISTORICIZATION OF ARTHURIAN
LEGEND IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *THE BURIED GIANT***

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ABSTRACT

Kazuo Ishiguro (1954), the Nobel Laureate author, setting his novel *The Buried Giant* in Arthurian Britain, thoroughly analyzed prominent points of memory, trauma, forgetfulness, and chivalric code by way of narrating the interesting detours of Axl and Beatrice in a story of loss, death, regret, and love. In a strange forgetfulness, which causes villagers to forget their distant and recent past, the buried story about Arthurian chivalry manifests itself on every page by raising questions on the concepts of loyalty, honour, and courage. Ishiguro tells the story of the old couple, Axl and Beatrice, who perseveringly want to find their son, crumbs of information about who would bring out the painful consequences of having an illegitimate baby. He also rewrites the Arthurian legend from a contemporary perspective by making use of elements related to the concepts of memory and trauma.

The aim of this study is to analyze the concepts of loss, death, memory, trauma, remembering, and forgetting under the basic points of postmodern narrative strategies such as historiographic metafiction to show the determinant factors on the historicization of King Arthur in an evolutionary story of Kazuo Ishiguro in a 21st-century perspective.

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Buried Giant*, Historiographic Metafiction, Memory, Trauma, King Arthur

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**YOZLAŞMIŞ TOPRAKLAR ALTINDA GÖMÜLÜ KRAL
ARTHUR'UN SÖZDE EFSANESİ: KAZUO ISHIGURO'NUN
GÖMÜLÜ DEV ROMANINDA ARTHUR EFSANESİNİN
YENİDEN YAZIMI**

ÖZ

Gömülü Dev adlı romanının anlatısını Kral Arthur dönemi Britanyasında kurgulayan Nobel Edebiyat Ödüllü yazar Kazuo Ishiguro (1954), bu eserde Axl ve Beatrice'in ilginç yolculuklarını kayıp, ölüm, pişmanlık ve aşk unsurlarıyla bir arada anlatarak bellek, travma, unutmama ve şövalyelik kurallarının öne çıkan unsurlarını derinlemesine incelemiştir. Köylülerin yakın ve uzak geçmişleri hatırlamamasına neden olan tuhaf bir unutkanlık süresince, Arthur efsanesine ait şövalyelik geleneği hakkındaki gömülü anlatı, sadakat, onur ve cesaret gibi değerleri hemen her sayfada sorgulayarak kendisini gösterir. Ishiguro, oğullarını ısrarla bulmak isteyen ve hakkında çok fazla bilgi olmayan yaşlı çift Axl ve Beatrice'in hikayesini, gayri meşru bir bebek sahibi olmanın acı verici sonuçlar doğuracak olması üzerinden anlatır. Ayrıca bellek ve travma kavramlarıyla ilgili unsurlardan yararlanarak Arthur efsanesini çağdaş bir perspektifte yeniden yazar.

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Kazuo Ishiguro'nun Kral Arthur efsanesini 21. yy bakış açısıyla yeniden yazmasındaki belirgin faktörlerin ne olduğunu göstermek için, kayıp, ölüm, bellek, travma, hatırlama ve unutmama gibi olguları, tarihsel üstkurmaca gibi postmodern anlatı stratejilerine ait temel unsurlarla birlikte irdelemektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Gömülü Dev*, Tarihsel Üstkurmaca, Bellek, Travma, Kral Arthur

1. INTRODUCTION

The Buried Giant delves into the contradictions between narrative and historical obligation, arguing that an excess of independence would eventually lead to conflict. This exploration is carried out by the novel's use of fantastic imagination, especially through the way that landscape renders literal what might otherwise be figurative ways of discussing memory: a mystical mist erodes people's memories, their memories are buried under the ground, and they are irrevocably erased by a journey across the water told through the perspectives of Axl and Beatrice.

The significance of the paper is related to the exploration of historiographic metafiction, and manipulation and distortion of historical facts with a thorough analysis of how memory and trauma haunt peoples of different historical backgrounds. Starting from the point that history is a narrative construction, and loss and recall of individual as well as collective memory have a huge impact on [re]shaping the minds and mentalities of people, this study tries to achieve a display that presents the possible maneuvers and distortions of the narratives about Arthurian Britain. Apart from touching upon issues of memory and scrutinizing trauma in the

individual and social sense, the study also emphasizes how unburying alternative narrations and voices may contribute to forming a new perspective about what might have [not] happened to those who celebrated the great and untainted victories for years.

Kazuo Ishiguro, putting the concept of memory at the centre of his prominent works such as *A Pale View of Hills*, *Never Let Me Go*, *Remains of the Day*, and *The Buried Giant*, has always been able to draw attention to the relation between the past experiences of his characters and how they are influenced by these experiences, some of which may be influential in terms of sharing a sense of traumatic incidents. National history, collective memory, and personal identity have become closely associated with the works of Ishiguro, and the way he analyses these notions is a great reflection of how the human mind is constructed and how it works. The memories, either collected or recalled, may be a striking point for the revelations he makes. His readers become prepared, not for a conventional conclusion of a literary text but to confront the open-ended mould of human life, including numerous questions about whether the human brain may make people believe in an illusion rather than reality, no matter how constructed or artificially formed.

As Shaffer states below;

The author is more a novelist of the inner character than of the outer world. To be sure, these novels readily engage historical and political realities, but history and politics are explored primarily in order to plumb the depths and shallows of the characters' emotional and psychological landscapes. (Shaffer, 1998, p. 8)

In that sense, *Buried Giant* is one of those fictional narratives to which Ishiguro raises a lot of questions related to the tradition of epic and legend, endeavouring to help readers acknowledge that historical narratives could be misleading when records of what happened in the past are biased to favour the victor, authority, power, or decision-maker. Starting the narrative after the death of Arthur and with the story of the old couple, Axl and Beatrice, who persevere in wanting to find their son, Ishiguro rewrites the Arthurian legend in a contemporary perspective, with implicit references to the concepts of memory and trauma by bringing forward some speculations and debatable questions about the decisions of legendary Arthur and influence in the history of Britain.

2. Historicized Legend of King Arthur

The thin line between the idealization of the code of chivalry and the hypocritical nature of knighthood helps to pose a heretical counter-argument in *The Buried Giant*, which places itself within the long-standing Arthurian tradition in literature and delves deeper into the memories of civilizations through the perspectives of those who represent the Arthurian code of chivalry

and war-making knights as injustice-keepers. Instead of erasing the past, Ishiguro shows us how the playfulness of memory and language works in accordance with forgetting and remembering. “To speak of provisionality and indeterminacy is not to deny historical knowledge, however” (Hutcheon, 2003, p. 88). Disputable and controversial features of Arthur lead to speculations about the legendary figure in opposition to what historians have written. In that sense, King Arthur remains as the most important historical and cultural figure of Britain whose deeds and identity have been ambiguously altered and become one of the major elements of historiographic metafiction.

Britons and Saxons are the two opposite sides in the novel whose historical incidents are determinant of the authority in the island and each has been trying to become dominant ever since they have settled in the land. However, the battle between these two includes certain speculative interpretations and implicit references to how victories happen to be known with mistaken narratives. As it is unearthed “the violence of the past cannot be entirely hidden in this novel and erupts in uncanny and disturbing ways” (Falcus and Piqueras-Oro, 2020, p. 3). Behind those victories, there are distorted facts and re-interpreted values of the Old English period such as honour, loyalty, and courage.

Emphasizing the narrator’s condemnation of Gawain as a knight, the novel scrutinizes the realities of the battle between the Saxons and Britons where no honour was seen or experienced. Challenging against the deeds of the Old English and Medieval Period, “unlike many of its predecessors which primarily engage with individual war memory, this novel focuses on the loss of collective war memory, and uses characters like Gawain and his Saxon counterpart Wistan to show the activity of social elites” (Wang, 2021, p. 228). Reading about how Saxons were treated by Arthur’s men and how they witnessed “their children and kin mutilated and ravished,” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 162) their infants “bloodied toys kicked about these cobbles” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 162) by the Britons who took “turns to rape young girls even as they lay dying of their wounds” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 162) takes the argument about the fictionalized horrible actions to another level. Prominent points such as memory, trauma, forgetfulness, and the chivalric code have been probed in the novel by way of narrating the interesting detours of Axl and Beatrice in a story of loss, death, regret, and love. In a strange forgetfulness, which causes villagers to forget their distant and recent past, the buried story about Arthurian chivalry manifests itself on every page by raising questions about the concepts of loyalty, honour, and courage. Thus, “the postmodern reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge” (Hutcheon, 2003, 89). The problematization of Arthur’s legend enables readers to ask questions about the reliability of historiography. That is to say “at the heart of Ishiguro’s work is a series of grand, dialectical oppositions: between History and the Present; Objectivity and Subjectivity; Reality and Imagination; Individual and

Collective; Contingency and Universality; Realism and Surrealism” (Matthews and Groes, 2009, p. 7).

Anne Whitehead says “the ‘memory’ of trauma is thus not subject to the usual narrative or verbal mechanisms of recall, but is instead organized as bodily sensations, behavioural reenactments, nightmares, and flashbacks” (Whitehead, 2009, p. 115). Since the novel is completely based on a national flashback in which nightmarish facts have been unearthed, memory-wiping mist exhaled by the dragon Querig blurs the legendary actions of Arthur and causes people to forget why they have become enemies or allies of each other during the violent and exhausting battle between the Britons and Saxons. Arthur and his knights are said to have been involved in all honourable, loyal, courageous, and epic actions. But how much of it is true?

The mist initially dominates *The Buried Giant*; in the middle segment, the past is figured as material traces buried beneath the landscape; and near the end, Axl and Beatrice anticipate embarking on a journey through water that causes a final and definitive forgetting analogous to death. Created by Merlin’s spell and causing a kind of a delay in the minds of characters, similar to Amnesia or Alzheimer’s Disease, the “icy fogs hanging over rivers and marshes” and “the mist” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 3) rob them of their crucial memories. For the protagonists, Axl and Beatrice, these memories are mostly related to their missing son; they have difficulty remembering where he lives and what happened to separate them. However, for the rest of the characters and even for the readers, this mist has to be removed to understand the debatable questions and speculative interpretations of Arthur and his knights, and the reason for the battle between Saxons and Britons. It is how the “elements of fantasy, in distancing Axl and Beatrice from *The Buried Giant*’s already remote historical setting, situate the couple’s discovery of troubling memories in catastrophic consequences that could occur in any location or time period” (Burow-Flak, 2019, p. 258).

Caruth states that “the painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way” (Caruth, 1996, p. 59). Seeing that, all the values people of the Old English period believed in have been distorted and twisted, unpleasurable events and painful flashbacks can be read through Arthur’s gray actions and hazardous remnants of his deeds. The area seems cursed by this mist and people have difficulty in remembering their pasts, not only the personal relations, but the relations between communities are vague too, “for in this community the past was rarely discussed” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 7); it has become rare since people are used to forgetting things and it has become normal for them. It does not mean that discussing past issues “was a taboo...It had somehow faded into a mist as dense as that which hung over marshes” (Ishiguro, 2016, pp. 7-8). Some people in the villages are not allowed to sit under candlelight, including Axl and Beatrice, and this darkness is used by the author both literally and

figuratively to show how the physical environment and the minds of the characters have gone completely dark and misty. In Julie Hansen's terms "it is perhaps not realistic to expect that we will ever be on easy terms with the past" (Hansen, 2015, pp. 206-207).

"Memory traces are triggered in the minds of Ishiguro's characters by their surroundings, events that they experience and memory objects" (Teo, 2014, p. 17). Key points and events go through a process of delay to be revealed later in the narration through flashback and cleared or expounded memory to show the phase of remembering after Querig has been eliminated right before the novel ends. The quest of Axl and Beatrice mainly focuses on the efforts of remembering their son. However, their state of mind is fitful and the "recollections were growing confused, in much the way a dream does in the seconds after waking" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 12); these recollections are not significant just for the protagonists but they also will reveal the covered and hidden things related to the history of Britain. "*The Buried Giant*, in its depiction of the aftermath of genocide, offers no opportunity for forgiveness between warring cultures because the memory necessary for any kind of forgiveness has been obscured" (Burow-Flak, 2019, p. 257), and due to all the veils upon individual and national experiences, the narrative unfolds itself with unavoidable as well as shocking revelations.

3. King Arthur *Buried Under Corrupted Lands*

Ishiguro's analogy between a dream and what people remember about their country's past is another issue to be discussed since the postmodern approach to history has always been quite controversial, casting doubts on historical narratives and historians, accusing them of producing constructed realities to convince people to believe in certain ideologies. From that point on, "despite the clarity of Ishiguro's texts, the language sometimes becomes overstrained and constructed to the point of collapse, so that 'reality' too gives way to possibilities that are dangerous and contingent" (Matthews and Groes, 2009, p. 7). Arthurian legend is one of those narratives to be interpreted and re-evaluated in this novel. With the understanding of the systematics of memory, Ishiguro shows how a general perception of historical facts could easily be deconstructed through new perspectives and analyses towards what has become or been accepted as historically correct. As his narrative "raises questions about the domain of historiography, from the problems of autobiographical writing to the representation of historic events, the difficulties raised by this trope have forced us to reconsider our prejudices about literary realism, omniscient narration, and history" (Smith, 2007, p. 116). Considering the fact that history and historical facts are twistable and flexible by its nature, it is how the readers recognize that "in Ishiguro's fiction, history recedes into the background, and individual struggle against the odds of life is highlighted in the foreground. Ishiguroian protagonists are distinguished by their dignity, responsibility, and courage to reconcile with the perversities of life" (Guo, 2012, p. 2515).

The mysteries about characters' backgrounds, which are reflected through fragments of personality characteristics and preoccupations, create personal and emotional conflicts between Axl – who once served Arthur but now works for the benefit of his community while missing memories lead to problems in his relationship with his wife – and Beatrice – who tries not to remember her adultery out of fear of losing Axl forever. They also pose questions about national and historical representations, as in the case of Gawain, who tries to defend Arthur in every case with no exception and reflections about polemical sayings of Wistan – as a Saxon warrior sent by his king to kill Querig who cannot forgive Britons for the horrible injustice they caused. These mysteries lead to “a journey” Axl and Beatrice “must go on and no more delay” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 20). This journey is crucial for the couple to solve the mystery about their son, why “they become oddly uncomfortable whenever the topic was broached” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 21). And the uneasiness or discomfort will become very striking for the past Axl has gone through and how Arthur was known and how he should be known.

“Postmodernist art (and postmodernist writing in particular) is thought to know that it cannot match up to what goes beyond comprehension in contemporary experience” (Connor, 2004, p. 67). The memories of our old married couple, Axl and Beatrice, as well as the references to the war, are vague and blurred. Ishiguro first poses important questions or creates doubts in Axl's mind about his past and ambiguous participation in the war when he says “I don't know... When the man speaks of wars and burning houses, it's almost as if something comes back to me. From the days before I knew, it must be” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 48). These questions, during the hazardous journey of the couple, turn into a kind of an epidemic and are asked by the characters and the readers awaiting all the answers to be unleashed as a result of an epic resolution, “memory is thus both the source of the familial bonds that Axl and Beatrice hope to repair, and also the basis of the social identities that threaten to consume the land with violence” (Stacy, 2021, p. 110) because this was the war that caused massacres, rapes and violent acts suffered by numerous people and as the story continues, every small detail about the personal and national past experiences reveals itself to show what the real reason of the peace is between two sides. On the one hand, characters discuss “how this land had become cursed with a mist of forgetfulness” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 51); on the other hand, others question this curse regarding whether it has become a way of imposing propaganda or if it is a kind of punishment for those who behaved unfairly. The magically induced forgetting in the novel nearly exemplifies Ricoeur's idea of *amnesty*: that is, a mechanism of forgetting that “brings to conclusion serious political disorders affecting civil peace” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 455). However, “memories aren't gone forever, just mislaid somewhere on account of this wretched mist” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 52) and they will be found again.

What the characters are going after seems different but the outcome for everyone will almost be the same. Axl and Beatrice are looking for their son to learn why they live separately. However, during this search, Axl will have to encounter his warrior past and important details about Arthur's assignments to his knights. Wistan wants to kill the dragon to end this disease-like process and Sir Gawain does not reveal what his real purpose is – that he is trying to stop people from killing the dragon since Arthur would prefer not to be remembered as a legend causing slaughters, violent killings, and sufferings for people, which will most probably be all remembered after the mist is gone – almost until the end. The narrative is built like a foggy landscape or scene and on every page, the sight or view gets unambiguous thanks to Ishiguro's efforts of unearthing what is hidden behind all these incidents of personal and national history. Ishiguro tells us that "Querig's menace comes less from her actions than from the fact of her continuing presence" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 72). This presence is the reason why the landscape seems like a hazy countryside plain and it may change with the help of "an aged knight left from Arthur's days, charged by that great king many years ago to slay Querig" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 72). This is the most powerful indication that they will be enlightened in their minds after the mist is gone and everything, either personal or national, will become revealed. Yet it is not that easy to see thoroughly and clearly because another question to be solved is "it might be God himself had forgotten much from our pasts, events far distant, events of the same day. And if a thing is not in God's mind, then what chance of it remaining in those of mortal men?" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 73). The unorthodox construction of God's memory and a slight possibility that nothing will be remembered again causes great fear for some.

There are explicit references to the fact that imperial strategies of colonization were initiated much longer ago than what has been said in the history books and Arthur might have been involved in this process because when Wistan says that he "learnt to speak Briton's tongue" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 81), he implies how they were exposed to the cultural alterations after the war between Britons and Saxons. The first mention of Arthur, however, was in the words of Sir Gawain when he saw Axl and Beatrice who were trying to stay out of trouble and avoid getting caught by furious brigands; "This sword and armour I carry only out of duty to my king, the great and beloved Arthur, now many years in heaven, and it's almost as long surely since I drew in anger" (Ishiguro, 2016, pp. 118-119). Due to depicting Arthur with common and recognized characteristics, Ishiguro builds up the story until a perplexing and striking final twist about this legendary figure which happens to bring forward the significance of multiplicity or multi-faceted perspectives constructed by the characters in the novel, even about the most beloved of legends who had and still has subservient followers. Building his perspective upon the fact that "determining any particular historical situation may eradicate a truth that all history and people change in the course of time, Ishiguro is also concerned with how to incorporate that knowledge of change

and inconstancy in his novels” (Wong, 2005, p. 14). History is, thus, too fictitious to be able to have such predetermined, prejudiced or biased interpretations to be accepted as facts by nations throughout centuries.

First, Wistan praises Arthur and what he has done for these lands, saying “it’s an honour indeed to meet a knight of the great Arthur. Saxon though I am, his name is one I hold in esteem” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 122). It’s not a very strong bond that Wistan builds with the Britons, and the respect he has for the great Arthur is fragile beyond any doubt. Then, when Arthur’s nephew Sir Gawain is introduced to the characters and the readers, implications about Axl’s past start to be clarified: “Sir Gawain, I ask you now, turn and look carefully at him. Is his face one you’ve seen before, though a long time ago?” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 122). None of the characters or the readers are sure whether Axl could be one of the warriors sent on duty to fight beside Sir Gawain. Axl might be crucial for shaping the perceptions of who the great Arthur is.

4. Memory and Trauma Re-writing the National History

Paul Ricoeur makes an important point implying that memory and forgetting are not opposed, but he rather states that forgetting “designates the unperceived character of the perseverance of memories, their removal from the vigilance of consciousness” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 440). Unleashing the memories about the national history of the land and the great Arthur is not that easy, but after Sir Gawain, Axl and Wistan start spending time together, every sentence might influence the memories of these three and start the recalling and remembering process with a triggering point. Continuing with statements of praise about Arthur,

and even though it’s years since Arthur fell, isn’t it our duty still to wear his crest with pride for all to see? So we go on boldly and when men see I’m a knight of Arthur, I’m happy to report they look on us gently. (Ishiguro, 2016, pp. 125-126)

Thus, the narrator is trying to show that there are two sides of being perceived as a great figure; on the one side you might be accepted as a hero but on the other side you are always an enemy of someone, “but can it really be the same in those countries where Arthur was once such a dreaded enemy?” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 126). However, if it is the case for Arthur, he could be an exception and maybe he can be respected by everyone including even those whom he defeated; “for Arthur was one so generous to those he defeated they soon grew to love him as their own” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 126).

Those aforementioned statements and questions are enough for Axl to go deep in his mind and have some vague reminiscences of the past because he experiences some kind of disturbance as soon as he hears the dialogue

For some time—in fact, ever since Arthur’s name had first been mentioned—a nagging, uneasy feeling had been

troubling Axl. Now at last, as he listened to Wistan and the old knight talk, a fragment of memory came to him. It was not much, but it nevertheless brought him relief to have something to hold and examine. (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 126)

Fragments of memories will continue to buzz in Axl's head but that point in the novel is one of the crucial ones to see how the text starts niggling reminders which all function as triggers to see the traumatic experiences of the communities and Arthur's misinterpreted and distorted virtues. In Ricoeur's schema, collective recalling and forgetting necessitate three distinct forms of memory, all of which play a role in his idea of difficult forgiving. He compares the archive with the first form of memory, written traces. Following traumatic incidents, written traces are often officially registered and can stem as much from the desire to preserve the peace as it does from the desire to bring justice to those who have been wronged. All the aforementioned forms of memory can be seen in *The Buried Giant* since the characters' loss of memory is close to the brain damage that is the source of the psychiatric term *amnesia*. Plagued by that amnesia, Axl and Beatrice are trying to hold on to each other hard during their journey to find the nameless child, but they are not aware that this journey will cause things to fall apart in their personal life and home truths will be revealed for the rest of the communities living in those lands, some of whom will feel betrayed after Querig is out of breath.

What Arthur has done in those lands is also revealed by his questionably virtuous nephew saying, "Our beloved Arthur brought lasting peace here between Briton and Saxon, and though we still hear of wars in distant places, here we've long been friends and kin" (Ishiguro, 2016, pp. 126-127); the war is quite distant now and people have no reason to fear, thanks to great Arthur since he was the one who brought peace and stopped massacres in the battlefields. Another point to see the distortable state of the historical figures and narratives is that "these examples work to break the frame of the main story and remind us of the context in which the story is being told" (Smith, 2007, p. 100). The characters are too glad to glorify and elevate what Arthur has done and how distinguished he has always been. The reader can even get the sense of ironic remarks coming most probably out of the narrator's witty mind, but it seems like Arthur could be the only one in the world who could bring peace to these lands with inexplicable talents: As Wistan wonders about "by what strange skill did your great king heal the scars of war in these lands that a traveller can see barely a mark or shadow left of them today?" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 127). The question is quite clear that bringing peace even in those days is so difficult and for preserving it one might need help from supernatural forces or God. Arthur, according to Sir Gawain, seems like an exception in doing this. Because of his sound and untainted personality, he has become a hero even for the ones he won a victory against.

However, there must be something wrong here because "isn't it a strange thing when a man calls another brother who only yesterday

slaughtered his children?" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 127). Although Arthur here seems to be accused of slaughtering some people's children, Wistan changes the direction of his conversation and Arthur becomes uncorrupted again; "And yet this is the very thing Arthur appears to have accomplished" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 127). He brought peace to these lands and convinced people whose children might have been once slaughtered by the great Arthur to show respect for the man. For a novel like *The Buried Giant* that pursues "to break through a history of silence, bear witness to an erased past, piece together and re-claim the lives of a disappeared peoples, re-narrate a country's past so as to make visible a previously unacknowledged history of terror" (McCormack, 2013, p. 48), it would be unchallenging to see the layered historical narrative with numerous manoeuvres starting from individual to the national. Having been pushed from pillar to post in the above-mentioned questions and statements with significant references to examples of historiographic metafiction, Arthur has already become a distrusted figure before the eyes of Wistan and Axl, even of readers. Wistan is trying to have someone in his corner in this debate and Axl seems the one who fits most; "Master Axl, do you not feel it a remarkable thing, how Arthur has united this country?" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 127). Axl may not remember what kind of talents he had in the past but has some fragments of memory:

There had been a time when Axl, too, had once nudged his horse forward, in another small but subtly vital maneuver, bringing himself in line with a fellow rider. What had he been doing that day? The two of them, he and the other rider, had been waiting on horseback, staring out across a vast grey moor. (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 129)

He does not know what type of strategic duties he was assigned to, but Wistan is very well aware that Axl needs somehow to remember all these things to reveal the real great (!) king who seemed as if he had brought peace but did something terrible to hide his ominous intention.

After some details about Arthur's influence upon the peace have been revealed, the missions of the courageous warriors become apparent. Wistan is charged to kill the dragon so that the mist will disappear, but Sir Gawain objects and says "Slay Querig?! You really mean to slay Querig?!" Sir Gawain was now shouting. 'But sir, this is a mission entrusted to me! Do you not know this? A mission entrusted to me by Arthur himself!'" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 136). This is the first time Sir Gawain distorts the facts since he is responsible for protecting the dragon for reasons he will reveal in the final chapters of the novel, but first, he accepts the fact after Axl asks him to confess: "'Sir Gawain', Axl said finally. 'We look now to you, sir. Let's keep no more disguises between us. You're the she-dragon's protector, are you not?'" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 319). Sir Gawain is only a man of duty and he follows whatever he is asked to do. In Caruth's terms "[he] describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic event in which the

response to the event occurs in the often delayed, the uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena,” (Caruth, 1996, p. 11); which can be interpreted that the overwhelming experience of carrying the burden of the harsh reality on his shoulders, Sir Gawain is one of the individuals who is exposed to the intrusive state of trauma. “It is here that the novel engages with what Kaufman identifies as neomedievalism’s central concern with trauma and loss” (Falcus and Piqueras-Oro, 2020, p. 4), and thus, exposing the process of distorting the facts and historical incidents is a key point in unleashing the traumatic experiences and memories of the peoples in the lands where Saxons and Britons have been forced to believe there was something called peace, which turned out to be something deceptive, manipulative and artificial:

Neomedievalism finds a way of clinging to the past by rejecting the “history,” the alterity, the time and space that separated it from its desired object and bringing it into the present. But what initially appears to be medievalism’s denial of history may, instead, be a desire for history alongside the uncomfortable suspicion that there is no such thing. Neomedievalism consumes the Middle Ages in fragmented, repetitive tropes as a way of ensuring against loss. And, as we shall see, in many of neomedievalism’s manifestations, futurity is foreclosed, for the future leads only to the past. (Robinson and Clements, 2009, p. 3)

They have been used and abused for a king’s, like as not, self-interests. Even Lord Brennus, who wants to tame Querig to fight on his side and start a new war with Saxons, is shown, by Sir Gawain, like a traitor who is trying to break that peaceful environment achieved by the great King: “It was another reason I wouldn’t side with this wretch now gutted like a trout. I fear this Lord Brennus is one who would undo the great peace won by Arthur” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 141). While Wistan is trying to reveal the real reason behind the peaceful environment where signs of massacres, violence, and rapes could only be hidden with some kind of collective forgetfulness, Sir Gawain is trying so hard to protect his beloved King and continue to maintain the corrupted nature of peace with distorted facts.

5. Distortion of Historical Facts

Conversations between Wistan and Axl about a “barbarous past [hopefully gone forever]” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 162), in their opinion, are influential in determining their attitudes towards a new sense of nationhood built upon a traitorous act, coming by the least suspected figure in their history, and this perception will be dramatically changed right before the dragon is found and killed. Each chapter is like a veil made of mist on these lands and the minds of the characters. To take this veil off, sacrifice is necessary because justice is the most crucial thing for everyone;

How can you describe as penance, sir, the drawing of a veil over the foulest deeds? Is your Christian god one to be bribed so easily with self-inflicted pain and a few prayers? Does he care so little for justice left undone? (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 173)

Even God is accused of permitting people to cause suffering and satisfy their ambitions and desires. As Beatrice points out, “Your Christian god of mercy gives men licence to pursue their greed, their lust for land and blood, knowing a few prayers and a little penance will bring forgiveness and blessing” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 173); what would happen if Arthur’s real intentions are revealed?

For now, the guilt is all upon “the dragon Querig that roams these peaks” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 176) and she is the cause of the mist so with her death the “memories will be restored” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 176). When the dragon is slain – which is desired by everyone except the deceased Arthur and his nephew Sir Gawain, each of whom is holding corners of that veil hiding the harsh reality about what happened to bring peace – the memories once robbed by the breath of the dragon with a magic spell upon these lands are waiting in a conserved state to rush out like the contents of Pandora’s Box.

“Knowledge is no longer the subject, but in the service of the subject: its only legitimacy (though it is formidable) is the fact that it allows morality to become reality” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 36). When characters start to mention details about unpeaceful incidents that occurred in the past, Sir Gawain’s reactions are quite interesting, as if he feels all the blame is put on his king and himself, saying “What do you suggest, mistress? That I committed this slaughter?” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 197). The skulls were not capable of telling the old stories about what happened to them but Sir Gawain seems very well aware of what pang of conscience means, still trying hard not to confess it to himself and pointing to his beloved great King as a target: “So many skulls, you say. Yet are we not underground? What is it you suggest? Can just one knight of Arthur have killed so many?” (Ishiguro, 2016, pp. 197-198). The evidence about slaughter is almost everywhere and Ishiguro is showing these through the perspective of a character who has no idea about what war is or what it costs: ““What are all these skulls, sir?” Beatrice suddenly asked the knight. ‘Why so many? Can they all have belonged to babies? Some are surely small enough to fit in your palm’” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 199). It is, to some, beyond doubt that war is cruel, violent, and merciless to many people; however, no one could probably come through such an unscrupulous act unscathed, even if he is depicted as a legendary King.

Sir Gawain immediately denies the questions of Beatrice and says “What is it you suggest, mistress? The skulls of babes? I’ve fought men, beelzebubs, dragons. But a slaughterer of infants? How dare you, mistress!” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 199). Of course, he did not accept the accusation ascribed to his King and himself. However, Arthur’s men are under great suspicion of

having been involved in unacceptable acts of violence which may change the entire course of events.

Although the mist is depicted as a very powerful state of mind and it “hangs heavily across the past” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 206), Sir Gawain’s “talk of Arthur stirs long-faded thoughts” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 206) in which Axl could also have been involved with a special task. As his past starts to be revealed with small details in Gawain’s first reverie, the facts turn out to be unbearable even to remember, let alone experience:

News of their women, children and elderly, left unprotected after our solemn agreement not to harm them, now all slaughtered by our hands, even the smallest babes. If this were lately done to us, would our hatred exhaust itself? Would we not also fight to the last as they do, each fresh wound given a balm? (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 242)

Elements of distortion including historical facts and figures are prevalent in the novel. Axl was involved in these incidents in the villages where he was considered a Knight of Peace:

These are the very villages I befriended in Arthur’s name. In one village they called me the Knight of Peace, and today I watched a mere dozen of our men ride through it with no hint of mercy, the only ones to oppose them boys not yet grown to our shoulders. (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 242)

Even Axl is aware of this weirdly ironic situation about what he has done and how he was called, and as disclosure continues, manipulations, distortions and perplexities seem to be going on incessantly.

“All literary fiction has to construct a ‘context’ at the same time that it constructs a ‘text’, through entirely verbal processes” (Waugh, 2001, p. 88). Multiple layers in the narrative show that on the one hand distortion and manipulation of *facts* could be related to any historical text. On the other hand, the language used by the characters representing binary oppositions reveals the fact that the Old English history of Britons has been reconstructed in the novel. In that sense, Axl puts the blame on himself while Gawain is trying to take him aside and remind him of Arthur’s praiseworthy rule for bringing peace, but what disturbs Axl is the treason he feels within going alongside with construction of reality thanks to the breath of she-dragon; “It was I won their trust where first there was only fear and hatred. Today our deeds make me a liar and a butcher, and I take no joy in Arthur’s victory” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 243). Reminiscences of Axl’s past are great signs of calumny brought over the names of Arthur, Gawain, and himself, which will be defamed forever. Sir Gawain feels that he needs to do something to legitimize the actions of his uncle and he expresses how Arthur had to take such decisions to stop further

enmities and slaughters by killing those who would one day become enemies of them:

Master Axl, what was done in these Saxon towns today my uncle would have commanded only with a heavy heart, knowing of no other way for peace to prevail. Think, sir. Those small Saxon boys you lament would soon have become warriors burning to avenge their fathers fallen today. The small girls soon bearing more in their wombs, and this circle of slaughter would never be broken. Look how deep runs the lust for vengeance! Look even now, at that fair maid, one I escorted here myself, watch her there still at her work! Yet with today's great victory, a rare chance comes. We may once and for all sever this evil circle, and a great king must act boldly on it. May this be a famous day, Master Axl, from which our land can be in peace for years to come. (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 243)

What Gawain is trying to show or Ishiguro is trying to say is that history is full of excuses for legitimizing acts of violence, cruelty, and suffering. It is hard to accept for those who caused these processes that they are bringing bloody solutions to feed their desires; that is why they almost always find a way to see something reasonable to base their arguments upon. However, plaguesome and besetting questions are inevitably coming to Gawain's mind subsequently;

A slaughterer of babes. Is that what we were that day? And what of that 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? Let an old man go in peace. A slaughterer of babes. (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 244)

On this epic road trip of Axl and Beatrice, there might be some questions appearing in the readers' minds as well. Is Gawain friendly or reliable? Is Querig another enemy or not? The Saxons and Britons are in fatal rivalry and war is brewing. The mist has made use of its benefits: old enmities have been forgotten. All these conflicts start to be resolved in chapter twelve when Wistan shares his deepest rage and hatred against Britons. He does not want Edwin, a young boy forced to leave his village because Saxons believe that he has been bitten by the fiend, to feel sympathy for Britons since he accuses them of causing all the slaughters and violence in those lands when asking from him with a confession that "Should I fall and you survive, promise me this. That you'll carry in your heart a hatred of Britons" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 276). Wistan wants to leave another seed behind to spread this intense emotion throughout the lands because he seems to be sick of people's manipulated minds and how they praised Arthur's bloody actions which brought a so-called peace through a tricky law. Edwin does not feel convinced,

though. He is not suspicious of Sir Gawain. As an example, he says “I don’t understand, warrior. Must I hate a Briton who shares with me his bread? Or saves me from a foe as lately did the good Sir Gawain?” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 276). Wistan continues spilling out his hatred and he also explains the reason behind all this, how his kind was slaughtered, their women were taken and they witnessed horrible things:

It was Britons under Arthur slaughtered our kind. It was Britons took your mother and mine. We’ve a duty to hate every man, woman and child of their blood. So promise me this. Should I fall before I pass to you my skills, promise me you’ll tend well this hatred in your heart. And should it ever flicker or threaten to die, shield it with care till the flame takes hold again. Will you promise me this, Master Edwin? (Ishiguro, 2016, pp. 276-277)

As Waugh states; “literary fiction demonstrates the existence of multiple realities” (Waugh, 2001, p. 89), and the reality of someone or some people could be a distorted piece of information for others since it is hidden by a mist for years in the novel that even legends could have bloody hands. Thus, Ishiguro draws a thin line between multiple perspectives in the novel, one side of which tries to reflect the great Arthur as a legendary figure bringing peace to the lands of Britons and Saxons where seeds of brotherhood will be sown, the other side to reveal Arthur as bringing war, violence, slaughter, and Saxon women forcibly inseminated by his men. Both sides are quite controversial in the novel, sharing with us the probability of distorted historical narratives and fictionalized historical figures. That is why, on the one hand, Sir Gawain is trying to protect his great King no matter what, and legitimize his actions, but secretly questioning too, and on the other hand Wistan is making a vow to take revenge or fill Edwin with the feelings of revenge against Britons saying; “when the hour is too late for rescue, it’s still early enough for revenge” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 277).

Since Arthur is not alive during the narrative time in the novel, there is no chance for him to defend himself, especially against people like Wiston, but there is an interesting point in the novel where Axl and Beatrice are talking to each other about what might happen when the dragon is killed and their memories are brought back. What seems quite interesting is that Axl’s wish to be remembered well by his wife seems quite similar to what Arthur would say to the people about how he would prefer to be remembered:

It’s simply this, princess. Should Querig really die and the mist begin to clear. Should memories return, and among them of times I disappointed you. Or yet of dark deeds I may once have done to make you look at me and see no longer the man you do now. Promise me this at least. Promise, princess, you’ll not forget what you feel in your heart for me at this

moment. For what good's a memory's returning from the mist if it's only to push away another? Will you promise me, princess? Promise to keep what you feel for me this moment always in your heart, no matter what you see once the mist's gone. (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 294)

Although Axl's and Gawain's roads are separated – Gawain kept following his uncle, Axl trying to stay away from violent acts – they both show signs of suffering from the pang of conscience with their revelations of national history, as Gawain reflects:

That great law you brokered torn down in blood! Yet it held well for a time. Torn down in blood! Who blames us for it now? Do I fear youth? Is it youth alone can defeat an opponent? Let him come, let him come. Remember it, sir! I saw you that very day and you talked of cries in your ears of children and babes. I heard the same, sir, yet were they not like the cries from the surgeon's tent when a man's life is spared even as the cure brings agonies? Yet I admit it.' (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 309)

Since it is difficult to accept as a victor the mistakes or wrong decisions you make, Gawain is going through that process of adapting himself to bowing his head but still resisting leaving behind his espousal of Arthur's ideology. Sir Gawain also remembers bits and pieces about their past with Axl in which striking points keep coming:

Master Axl, I see you before me now and I'm reminded of that night. The wind as fierce then as this one. And you, cursing Arthur to his face while the rest of us stood with heads bowed! For who wanted the task of striking you down? Each of us hiding from the king's eye, for fear he'd command with one glance to run you through, unarmed though you were. But see, sir, Arthur was a great king, and here's more proof of it! You cursed him before his finest knights, yet he replied gently to you. You recall this, sir? (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 311)

In-between details of national history and personal memory with the metaphorical use of Querig's breath, the narrative creates probabilities about different versions of historical figures which are all open to interpretations. Arthur is still at the centre of all these interpretations with Sir Gawain; however, these two different versions of the great king are not the only ones because it can be read between the lines in the narrative that there may be other versions of these figures which have not been told yet:

Arthur meets curses with gentle words. He thanked you for your service. For your friendship. And he bade us all think of you with honour. I myself whispered farewell to you, sir, as

you took your fury into the storm. You didn't hear me, for it was said under my breath, but a sincere farewell all the same, and I wasn't alone. We all shared something of your anger, sir, even if you did wrong to curse Arthur, and on the very day of his great victory! You say now Querig's breath keeps this from your mind, or is it the years alone, or even this wind enough to make the wisest monk a fool? (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 312)

Arthur's reaction against curses, appreciation of people's service for their men, how he values honesty, honour, loyalty, and friendship are beyond doubt that he has been known and accepted as someone with a pivotal role for years. Moreover, these utterances about Arthur's legendary personality, the way he has been perceived for many years, and how the narrative builds the story up to that point when there appears a belief like there is nothing wrong about him seems like a vehicle used by Ishiguro to create a confounding picture of the King towards the end of the novel.

Towards the middle of the novel, as mentioned before, Sir Gawain misdirected Wistan and the others about what his duty was, not killing the dragon but protecting it, and when he explains the reason why, we get a clear picture of how Arthur would prefer to be remembered by people after he is gone forever. As the dragon seems close to giving her last breath and she becomes weak as time passes, getting closer to death, Sir Gawain treats her like he is communicating with his uncle, letting him know that he has always been loyal and respectful of the great true King no matter what they have gone through together. He describes himself as "Her protector, and lately her only friend" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 319) and continues to tell about his close relation to her saying "the monks kept her fed for years, leaving tethered animals at this spot, as you do. But now they quarrel among themselves, and Querig senses their treachery. Yet she knows I stay loyal" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 319).

Merlin is another figure who has been reinterpreted and fictionalized in the narrative as one of the magicians helping Arthur maintain peace over the lands. It seems like the cause is high above Arthur:

So Merlin could place this great spell on her breath. A dark man he may have been, but in this, he did God's will, not only Arthur's. Without this she-dragon's breath, would peace ever have come? Look how we live now, sir! Old foes as cousins, village by village. (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 326)

It is something Arthur designed and Merlin applied, and thanks to them, people have become friends and they live in peace without knowing the reason. Thanks to this act they "cleansed the land of war" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 326), but it is still not enough. Questions and different interpretations of Arthur's decisions keep interfering in the narrative such as "What kind of god is it, sir, wishes wrongs to go forgotten and unpunished?" (Ishiguro, 2016, p.

327). It was about time for Arthur, if he were alive, to be put on trial for what he might have caused but he is gone long ago and his name is suffering from all these speculative interpretations of his participation in peace-bringing, slaughter-choosing acts.

It is not accepted by vengeful Wistan but forgetting seems so innocent and fair to Sir Gawain:

Let Querig do her work a while longer. Another season or two, that's the most she'll last. Yet even that may be long enough for old wounds to heal forever, and an eternal peace to hold among us. Look how she clings to life, sir! Be merciful and leave this place. Leave this country to rest in forgetfulness. (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 327)

Querig must live so that peace could be preserved; otherwise, facts will be revealed but wars will come after. The narrator's disturbing implication that to have and maintain peace, people need to forget their past is exemplifying a postmodern approach to historical facts in which numerous solutions have been written down none of which was able to protect the peace, with little effort of course. Another disturbing element about the peace in the novel is that it has been based upon a slaughter and a magic trick at the end of which everyone will remember how betrayed they feel and how they were deceived by one of the greatest warriors: "How can old wounds heal while maggots linger so richly? Or a peace hold forever built on slaughter and a magician's trickery?" (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 327).

Wistan first kills Sir Gawain and then the she-dragon; when all this happens we see there is no great joy in Wistan as it is implied that he killed the peace as well. Justice and revenge are expected after Wistan slays peace and throughout the journey of an old couple whose past experiences are conflicted and complicated, old hatreds, buried giants of vengeance and rage are waiting to be unleashed now:

You and I longed for Querig's end, thinking only of our own dear memories. Yet who knows what old hatreds will loosen across the land now? We must hope God yet finds a way to preserve the bonds between our peoples, yet custom and suspicion have always divided us. Who knows what will come when quick-tongued men make ancient grievances rhyme with fresh desire for land and conquest? (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 340)

One of the final revelations is related to the title of the novel, what the buried giant stands for, is horribly depicted after bloodshed took place in the lands where, once, people's destinies were written with blood until the great King Arthur's magical trick to bring peace thought to become everlasting, yet now gone forever because "she-dragon's no more, and Arthur's shadow will

fade with her” (Ishiguro, 2016, p. 340). After all these distortions, controversies, manipulations, hidden secrets, and mysteries have been written and rewritten on the palimpsest, “at the end of *The Buried Giant*, the settled peace is on the verge of breaking down, not because of a new conflict for resources, but due to the recollection of collective memory and the painful emotions evoked” (Wang, 2021, p. 233).

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *The Buried Giant* tells of the existence of a giant dragon that blurs people's minds, while it is shown in the narrative that the legendary figure King Arthur might not have preserved the peace before being buried as thought. The use of the concept of legend, which, by definition, is somewhere between reality and myth, reflects Kazuo Ishiguro's striking focus on the techniques such as historiography and historiographic metafiction. There are numerous references in the novel that the dragon, misty weather, Sir Gawain, Britons and Saxons, even King Arthur are metaphoric representations. Although these representations are different from each other, Ishiguro's narrative shows that history is susceptible to manipulation, distortion, change, and different interpretation.

Ishiguro is a far too subtle and complex writer to be satisfied with a clear message. Memory loss, which can be a blessing for a suicidal person, cannot help but threaten the entity with the breakdown of his or her self. A profoundly moving portrait of marital love, and how even the most precious memories can become fragile, is at the heart of *The Buried Giant*, shining brightly among all the dragons and warring knights. Axl and Beatrice are an elderly couple who, though suffering from the unexplained amnesia that has plagued the entire country, decide to visit a son they had forgotten existed. On their trip, they encounter a boatman in the ruins of a Roman villa, whose job is to ferry people to a dead island. Only if a couple can persuade him of their love would he let them fly together. From then on, Axl and Beatrice are plagued by the fear of failing such a test and being separated for good.

The human mind has been blurred through various ideologies or discourses in almost every period. Facts that do not coincide with ethics, morals, and social values are changed, hidden, or distorted from time to time. Describing these examples through King Arthur, one of the most important figures in the history of England, Ishiguro recounts the inquiries that emerged after the Second World War, the search for multiple truths, and the idea that there is no absolute truth in *The Buried Giant* with the point where 21st-century fictional texts have come.

Contrary to the narratives in the history books, by placing not one of the most important historical figures but an ordinary husband and wife at the center of the work, Ishiguro implies that the events or figures that determine the fate of nations through ordinary individuals may not be like what they are told. Unable to remember why they were separated from their sons, Axl and

Beatrice, instead of finding their son in this search, reveal that a figure that concerns the entire British nation caused massacres and slaughter rather than keeping the peace.

Therefore, instead of sharing an absolute truth, a truth that should be accepted by all, history brings people together with the constructed narrative that the historian has created with his subjective point of view. Kazuo Ishiguro here adds an alternative story to historical narratives with a fictional text he creates in *The Buried Giant* and challenges the supposed truths buried under the ground.

The Buried Giant, thus, is a melancholy novel, and the mist that pervades it is a melancholy mist. The mood of the story is dreamlike and calculated. There are adventures, sword battles, betrayals, armies, sly stratagems, and monsters slaughtered, but these events are told distantly, with the book's heart never racing faster. They are represented unequivocally, precisely, and at times poetically. Enemies are killed, but the deaths are never victorious. A whodunit-worthy culmination of a planned trap for a troop of soldiers is described in retrospect after we already know what must have happened. Stories, like figures in the mist, drift toward us in the narrative and then vanish. Axl and Beatrice, gentle, loving, and kind, want nothing more than to live, to meet their son, and to be together. They need to recall their history, but they are terrified of what those memories could bring.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding this research.

ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL / PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Ethics committee approval is not required for this study. There are no participants in this study.

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