

Efficacy of Peace Enforcement in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*

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Abstract

War is a social creation which entails the creation as well as subversion of authority figures. Wars range from basic, to those fought with highly advanced inventions. Regardless of the method, peace is the natural outcome of all wars. Various studies have been undertaken to understand the methods and tactics involved in peace establishment operations. Despite such efforts, wars continue to emerge in different regions of the world. This study aims to identify the most common methods of peace establishment and discern the productiveness of each of the methods identified. Theory of Post Traumatic Growth (PTG) and Theory of Tragic Optimism are used to illustrate how war is both traumatic and therapeutic in nature. The author has indicated two kinds of peace establishment which are widely practised in everyday world. One is a widely favoured method consisting of negotiation and the other involves the use of deceit and force to establish peace. It has been observed that thrusting peace upon society proves beneficial in the short run but becomes detrimental later. On the whole as negotiated peace is established amicably, it tends to last longer in the society.

Keywords: War, PTG, Theory of Tragic Optimism, Peace enforcement, Negotiated peace

Introduction

Literature is derived from the Latin term littera. It is a never-ending spring of life and reflects the society's state of being and mirrors of all its virtues and vices. It is a product of society and, in turn, moulds the society. Literature originated around the period of the Stone Age and continues to evolve to date. The most widely popular form of literature is English literature.

English literature originated in Britain and spread to various other countries due to colonial conquests carried out by Britain. It is ascertained to have begun during the time of the Anglo- Saxons. English gradually evolved from the Age of Chaucer and has adopted various styles and elements into its expansive reserve to become how it is in the current, modern world. It contains genres such as poetry, non- fiction, novel, etc. Novel originated in its proper form in 1740 with Samuel Richardson's Pamela, Or Virtue Rewarded.

After 1918, a wave of war literature emerged, featuring works like Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*, Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929), among others. Novels on war focus on concepts like psychological trauma and alienation,

memory and time. Prominent contemporary British writers focusing on war and historical fiction include Patricia Barker, David Mitchell, Ian McEwan, Kazuo Ishiguro and Sebastian Barry.

Among the above mentioned writers Sir Kazuo Ishiguro is a major celebrated literary figure. In 2017, Kazuo Ishiguro, an author of Asian-European heritage, was awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize in Literature, in addition to his earlier recognition with The Booker Prize in 1989 for his novel *The Remains of the Day*. Ishiguro commonly uses the first person narrative technique in his works and themes of time, memory and life-long deception are prominent features of his writings. In *The Buried Giant* (2015) Ishiguro alters the old Arthurian myth to question the effectiveness of peace enforcement. He also presents a wide and dichotomous view regarding war and its aftermath through a realistic portrayal of traumatic as well as therapeutic experiences in the lives of characters.

War is a universal phenomenon. The history of war courses down to the Mesolithic period. Wars occur due to communal hatred, quest for expanding wealth and boundaries, desire to establish dominance etc. War is usually considered to denote ill aspects whereas peace is associated with positive attributes but war and peace are actually two sides of the same coin.

The aftermath of a historical conflict between the Britons and Saxons is explored in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *The Buried Giant*. The land where the story is set is covered with a strange mist of forgetfulness. The primary protagonists of the story are Axl and Beatrice, an aging British couple who live in dwellings designed like rabbit warrens. They face the villagers' disrespect and humiliation. Like everyone in the village, even they have forgotten most of the knowledge about their past. Despite facing such tribulations, they continue to live humbly, kindly and try to uphold their dignity. He remembers how all the villagers who were on the lookout for a young girl named Marta, forget about her very existence after a short while. He also remembers faint instances of having led a happy life with his son who is no longer with him. Following her awakening, he divulges all of this to his wife, Beatrice, and together they embark on a mission to locate their son, whom they believe resides in a remote village.

During the course of their journey, Axl and Beatrice stop at a neighbouring Saxon village and befriend a Saxon warrior from the fenlands named Wistan and a young Saxon orphan, named Edwin. All of them set off towards a monastery and encounter an old knight of King Arthur named Sir Gawain on their way. In the monastery, they meet various monks who conspire against all of the characters.

The characters Wistan and Edwin share a close bond as they have experienced almost similar tragic experiences in their lives. They feel pained when any one of them suffers. Their interests are seen to be similar and they respect each other very much. A similar effect is seen in the society when people emerge from traumatic situations. The Post Traumatic Growth theory by Tedeschi and Calhoun suggests that a traumatic experience can elicit suppressed or latent emotions in individuals. War is an example of such an event where the survivors who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) show signs of PTG. The survivors of war show increased affinity to their co-warriors, display increased devotion towards their nation and appreciation of family and friends.

Victor Frankl's theory of Tragic Optimism enlists three aspects of the tragic triad, namely, pain, death and guilt. Research and overall observations of the society depict that when people re-live painful situations they start becoming mature and start showing fortitude against pain. Survivors of tragedy acknowledge their guilt and try to recompense for their mistakes and appreciate the value of life as they witness death from proximity. These incidents are portrayed in *The Buried Giant* through the camaraderie of Wistan and Edwin, the realisation of guilt in Sir Gawain and Axl's possessiveness for Beatrice.

All the events described above happen in the aftermath of traumatic events. Peace is the normal aftermath of a war but the success of a peacekeeping mission depends on the way in which it is established. In the novel it is seen that Axl had worked hard to broker the Law of Innocents. Depicted here is a strategy used by peacekeeping agencies to ensure an end to hostilities. In a normal aftermath of war, neutral agencies like the United Nations establish peace through negotiations, compromises and other such settlements. Like Axl, the peacekeepers in such organisations speak to foreign diplomats and also seek the opinions of the common citizens. These peacekeepers are usually liked and supported by the people as they seem understanding and trustworthy. People cooperate with the officials.

When situations go out of hand and the warring parties do not show any signs of garnering peace, international bodies like the U.N enforces peace. Peace enforcement forces countries to stop warring and behave peacefully whether they like it or not. However, this may or may not produce the desired outcome of the mission. In *The Buried Giant*, the spread of the mist of forgetfulness serves as an illustration of enforcing peace. This is visualised in real post-war situations too. Countries which have been colonisers in the past or the parties which have wreaked havoc on other parties often resort to peace enforcement as a way to end the war.

It has been observed that one of the reasons why peace enforcement is employed to allow the previously dominant party to continue its superiority. The superpowers believe that if oppression and rebellion is clamped down they emerge victorious. Lot of propaganda is done in order to make the other party forget the tyranny committed by the superior party. This works for a while and peace prevails. However, it is seen that such a method has another set of repercussions too.

After some time of peace enforcement it is noticed that an atmosphere of unrest starts to set in. In the novel *Wistan* represents the Saxons who were deceitfully suppressed by the Britons. Though the Saxons and Britons start to forge slightly friendly relations over time, they remain distrustful of each other. *Wistan* perfectly embodies the disastrous consequences of establishing peace forcibly. The treachery by the Britons turns him into a different person. He maintains secrets in the presence of Britons. This is because the abrupt peace causes vengeance to well inside him. His traumatic experiences make him desire justice for his wronged community. He prophesies to Axl, “The giant, once well buried, now stirs. When soon he rises, as surely he will. . . Men will burn their neighbours’ houses by night. Hang children from trees at dawn. The rivers will stink with corpses. . . And country by country, this will become a new land, a Saxon land . . .” (340). It is observed that in real situations also peace enforcement exhibits similar characteristics. Sometimes peacetime involves atrocities being committed by the members of the dominant party. When people are suppressed too much, they feel vengeful and become sceptical. Inter communal hatred increases and they lose faith in the system of peace. In the novel *The Buried Giant*, it is predicted that individuals will recall oppressive realities and ultimately rise up in revolt.

Conclusion:

It can be inferred that despite the trauma associated with war, it has the potential to inspire people with a sense of optimism. The characters in *The Buried Giant* undergo positive changes in the aftermath of war. Though they live in a time of peace, the peace has been enforced upon them. The kind of peace that Axl had sought to harbour through his peaceful negotiations by the Law of Innocents was favoured by everyone. It was a slow process but was starting to show positive effects. The form of peace enforced through deceitful means such as Querig brings peace temporarily but also cultivates feelings of

unrest, revenge, and dissatisfaction among people. This is clearly revealed by Wistan's prophecy of a future war where every Briton may be wiped out, and Saxons emerge as the supreme rulers of the land. When peace is forced upon the populace, the peacekeeping body also devises various kinds of propaganda. They encourage a kind of dissociative or collective amnesia. This may be seen through King Arthur's establishment of enforced peace through Querig where all the inhabitants are made to forget the displeasing atrocities committed by his men. He also wishes to achieve salvation for his sins through this method. It is thus observed and concluded that though peace is essential and favourable, it may flourish only when achieved through righteous means such as those adopted by Axl. Peace has to be harboured with proper consent in an amicable manner instead of being thrust upon the society against their will. The form of peace establishment should respect the interests of both parties. This may help reduce the probability of another war in the future.

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