Ishiguro’s *The Unconsoled* (1995) employs a different narrative style from his other six novels. When it appeared, it received mixed reviews. Reviewers said that this work is “a departure for Mr. Ishiguro” (Allen), and a “human tragi-comedy as seen from a Martian’s viewpoint” (Iyer). What surprised his readers was its Eastern European setting and dream-like narrative style. Compared to the “controlled” technique of his preceding novel, *The Remains of the Day*, *The Unconsoled* employs a more experimental style to represent the protagonist’s inner state.

In his earlier three novels, Ishiguro depicts landscapes of Japan and England through a calm, apparently naturalistic style. The first two Japanese novels, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), are set in a post-war Japanese city which reflects Ishiguro’s hometown, Nagasaki. The location shifts to England in *The Remains of the Day* (1989). Brian W. Shaffer calls them “superficially realistic earlier novels,” and separates them from “the more fabulist, experimental, or avant-garde later novels” (Shaffer 11). These include *The Unconsoled*, *When We Were Orphans* (2000) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005). His recent published work, *The Buried Giant*, can be added to this latter category. *The Unconsoled* is Ishiguro’s turning point since the later works continue to use an imaginary background.

The narrative of *The Unconsoled* basically follows the movement of consciousness of the protagonist, Ryder. Ishiguro says this new style is based on a “dream logic” (Hunnewell). Ryder visits a European city to perform a piano concert. As he progresses around the city, readers notice that this concert tour is actually a psychological search for his past. *The Unconsoled*’s narrative follows Ryder’s inner reality concerning his traumatic memories. In every odd situation he faces, he tries to blame others. However, he has been actually
struggling to escape from his childhood memories of parental discord. This process is written from a near omniscient point of view. Pierre François names this narrative mode “oneiric realism” (79). From numerous odd points in his narrative, the readers realize the narrator is hiding the past, and at the same time, is obsessed by it.

The dominant themes of *The Unconsoled* are the narrator’s childhood memory and isolation in the community. In this paper, I will look at how “memory” works in Kazuo Ishiguro’s fiction, especially in *The Unconsoled*, through comparison with his other works. Ishiguro calls the effect of his narrative “the texture of memory” (Hunnewell). His first novel is narrated by a female narrator who recollecting the death of her first daughter. This tone altered markedly in his fourth work, *The Unconsoled*. Though *The Unconsoled*’s narrative seems to be different from Ishiguro’s earlier works, this novel shares the same theme of traumatic memory with them.

The following section examines *The Unconsoled*’s complicated “dream” narrative. With the insertion of many different characters’ confessions concerning their past, the novel’s style represents the memories of the protagonist and other characters. The next part focuses on Ryder’s reminiscence on his childhood. Even if the form was more experimental, the common theme of memory appears throughout his works including *The Unconsoled*. By comparing *The Unconsoled* with Ishiguro’s earlier novels, I will discuss one of its main themes: past regret and childhood trauma. In the third section, I look at Ryder’s isolation in the community, and his failed attempt to share his recollections with those close to him. His forgetfulness displays this unsuccessful act of revisiting and editing his past. This theme is also seen in his recent work, *The Buried Giant*, which is also concerned with Ishiguro’s recurrent motifs of memory, loss, and personal trauma.

**Telling the Past: Narratives of *The Unconsoled***

Although *The Unconsoled* is mostly narrated from the protagonist’s point of view, the novel contains many embedded narratives of other characters. These texts often take the form of conversations. Their long confessions about their past sometimes irritate Ryder and distort the temporal structure of the novel, whose sense of time expands and shrinks depending on the character’s
situations. These embedded narratives taking the form of confessions often continue over many pages. In the opening chapter of the novel, Ryder listens to one of these. He goes into an elevator with a hotel porter, Gustav, and has a ride which takes about ten pages long. Gustav is eager to tell his life story and starts to explain his professional belief. He asks Ryder even to solve a personal problem of how to rebuild his relationship with his daughter. In this way, not only does the book consist of Ryder’s tangled memory, it is also filled with other people’s narratives of their past.

These embedded texts in the novel intervene in Ryder’s consciousness and memory. Although the story is mainly narrated from his perspective, it sometimes goes beyond one character’s point of view, when he seems to know what other people think inside of themselves as if he had the power of an omniscient narrator. For instance, Ryder looks into other characters’ anxiety inside. When he was waiting for a young pianist, Stephan, his point of view is stretching out. While Stephan drops in at Miss Collins’ flat, Ryder listens to their conversation though he was inside the car: “. . . I found I could still see the two of them clearly illuminated in the narrow pane to the side of the front door” (56). Moreover, he senses what comes over Stephan’s mind while the young man is driving: “. . . I caught sight of his profile in the changing light and realised he was turning over in his mind a particular incident from several years ago” (65). Ryder could see “a cold panic” (65) comes over Stephan when he thinks about the future failure of his recital on the Thursday Night. In the novel, Ryder is informed of what other characters wish him to know, and could see even what they want to hide from him.

In addition to the narrative’s mobile viewpoint, the novel’s spatiality is also fluid. The location of the novel itself contributes to this sense of fictionality. Richard Robinson states that the lack of reference to geography in *The Unconsoled* is Ishiguro’s attempt to overcome the critical responses to his former work which take historical elements as crucial in his novels. He says the city in *The Unconsoled* is “unidentifiable” (109) but nevertheless considers it important that the writer sets the story somewhere in Central Europe. Since this region has experienced territorial conflicts historically, it is defined primarily by the individual and collective memory of its inhabitants. He states: “The citizens of *The Unconsoled* live in a synthetic, paper-made Europolis without a particular history” (117).
This “unreal” setting for the novel is not entirely new. Barry Lewis calls Ishiguro’s Japan “fictive,” and claims that his Japanese works could have been set anywhere outside Japan. The themes of the first two novels, especially of *An Artist of the Floating World*, are seen in the third novel, *The Remains of the Day*. A proclaimed ethic of professionalism and continuous attempts at self-justification are the dominant tone in both of the novels in spite of their different locations. Moreover, just after the publication of *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro says he has chosen Britain as a “mythical landscape” (75) in one interview and describes his intentions:

. . . I’m trying to find some territory, somewhere between straight realism and that kind of out-and-out fabulism, where I can create a world that isn’t going to alienate or baffle readers in a way that a completely fantastic world would. (*Conversations* 75)

*The Unconsoled*’s narrative style is supposed to be Ishiguro’s new “territory.”

Although the narrative voice and the point of view vary, the common point about them is that most of the elements in the novel are about what happened to Ryder in the past. In the case of Ryder’s narrative, it repeatedly comes back to his familial discords. Though he seems to take steps for the future, he is obsessed by past memory. In this sense, the apparent oddity of the narrative of *The Unconsoled* follows the flow of Ryder’s mind. A. Harris Fairbanks questions critical responses which indicate Ryder’s narrative is “unreliable”: “. . . he [Ryder] is reliably reporting the way facts operate in the dreamworld” (612). According to Fairbanks, because the world in the novel is itself a dream, Ryder is not “unreliable” in a usual sense.

Many elements in *The Unconsoled* seem to be separated from the plot and disturb the narrator himself. Although they do not produce a coherent fictional background, they support Ryder’s inner world. According to Barthes’ concept of “the reality effect,” apparently “useless details” (142) in novels have the function to create the illusion of “concrete reality” (146). Richard Robinson claims that “. . . Ryder’s dream world is one in which the referent – the outside – is expelled from the sign” (112). *The Unconsoled*’s seemingly “useless” elements have meanings connected to Ryder’s memory.

This is significant in an episode when Ryder accidentally encounters an
unfamiliar “old ruined car” (260) in the city, which illustrates his memory’s unreliability. He firstly could not recognize it, but later, he realizes it was his father’s car and this realization brings more old memories to his mind. It was an apparently happy recollection of the family looking for his new bicycle. However, he had feared it might turn out to be superficial in front of others:

. . . it had dawned on me that to this old woman my parents and I represented an ideal of family happiness. A huge tension had followed this realisation . . . But I had become convinced that at any second some sign, perhaps even some smell, would cause the old woman to realise the enormity of her error, and I had watched with dread for the moment she would suddenly freeze in horror before us. (264)

Though Ryder fears others would realize the falsehood of their “ideal of family happiness” at this point, he replaces this with an illusory picture in a later scene. Ryder momentarily relaxes at the Hungarian café, and imagines a scene when his parents join his concert tour: “they would adopt the wilfully calm smiles I recalled from my childhood, from those rare occasions when my parents invited guests to the house for lunch or dinner” (398). These episodes evoke doubts on Ryder’s narrative’s reliability. The narrative of *The Unconsoled* blurs the boundary of dream and memory in the novel. Through these processes, the narrator’s mind gradually goes back to the past events.

The characteristics of Ryder’s narrative can be compared to other writers. Many critics (for example Tim Jarvis (158)) notice *The Unconsoled*’s resemblances to Kafka. Ishiguro himself notes Kafka and Dostoevsky as literary models in an interview with Maya Jaggi (*Conversations* 115). In spite of similarities in their narrative modes, *The Unconsoled* provides readers with information in a different way. By comparing the themes and narrative techniques of Kafka and Ishiguro, Robert Lemon remarks one of their differences in their use of “familial trauma.” Compared to Kafka’s works which leave this unexplained, Ryder’s trauma is described much more fully:

While the appearance in Central Europe of these places, people, and objects from Ryder’s English past breaks with conventional realism, it offers the consolation that the reader can connect these motifs to form a
comprehensible chronology. (214)

He notices that Ryder occasionally gains an omniscient narrative voice, and concludes it is to “propel the novel to a conclusion,” by providing readers with coherent reasons (218). With this narrative, readers can assume that the other characters are mirrors of Ryder. In the case of The Unconsoled, the experimental narrative works to explain the narrator’s mind.

Memory of Childhood: A Pale View of Hills and The Unconsoled

In The Unconsoled, the protagonist never indicates his childhood memory directly but the fragmentary information provided from outside gradually forms Ryder’s past. Though he never fully goes back to his childhood, the descriptions of other characters such as Stephan and Boris illustrate Ryder’s own early experiences. Their confessions, which Ryder could not recognize that he is familiar with at first, are revealed to actually concern his innermost private memory. Through mirrored characters, Ryder’s deeply repressed familial discords are revealed. Adelman examines The Unconsoled’s dream narrative, and states it represents the psychological process of Ryder by using “doubles.” The difficult relationships among them are echoes of Ryder’s interior life. Adelman states that “. . . the artistic aim of [The Unconsoled] is to externalize the central character’s interior life by means of doubles . . . The other characters exist only in reference to himself . . . .” Ryder is obsessed with his painful childhood memory and fears that he would do the same thing to any child of his own. But at the end of the novel, he repeats what he had experienced. Though the characters encountered in a strange town do not seem to share memory with Ryder, they show his stages of life and those fragmentary images create a picture of his inner life. Ryder’s attitude towards his family sometimes becomes harsh, which is eventually explained by his painful memory of childhood.

One of the mirror characters in the novel is Stephan Hoffman, who has many things in common with Ryder. This “gifted young pianist who is crushed by his egoistical parents might just be a version of Ryder as a youth” (Allen). He feels anxiety that he is the cause of his parents’ discord. Stephan’s story describes why Ryder is so keen on the Thursday Night concert; he tries to
regain his parents’ hopes and affection. However, Mr and Mrs Hoffman do not listen to their son’s successful piano recital, and Hoffman says to Stephan, “It would simply be too much to . . . to see our own dear son being made a laughing stock” (480). Ryder could see this conversation between them although this takes place behind the stage (478), which fact indicates that this is also a story for Ryder. Like Stephan’s story, Ryder tries to regain his parents’ hopes.

Ryder’s difficult relationship with his parents is indicated by remarks of other characters. His encounter with an old schoolmate, Fiona Roberts, reminds him of her words in the old days referring to his parents’ fights: “Don’t you know why they argue all the time?” (172). Because of this remark, it is suggested that he repeats this problematic relationship in his own family. His attitude towards his wife Sophie and son Boris is strangely distant. This shows Ryder’s fear that he would repeat his parents’ discord and indifference to their son.

Ryder’s childhood experience is reflected in the representation of Boris. Boris firstly appears as Gustav’s grandchild, but later, it is revealed that he is Ryder’s son who is always left with Sophie during his concert tour. When he and Boris arrive at their house where Boris says he spent his early childhood, Ryder realizes that “the room was by now growing steadily more familiar to me [Ryder]” (214). Ryder’s childhood home overlaps with that of Boris and Sophie. From the words of the man living in the neighborhood, readers know that the inhabitants of the house are arguing all the time: “. . . you had to listen to them shouting late at night” (215). In spite of Ryder’s agitation not to let Boris know it, the man continues that, “He was cruel when he was drunk” (216). On this occasion, Ryder tries to protect Boris from these remarks. However, at a later stage in the novel, he repeats similar cruel acts to Boris. Ryder takes away Boris’ beloved manual which he himself had given and calls it “useless” because offered with “no affection” (471). His hysterical saying reminds readers of his parents’ treatment of himself. This episode illustrates not only the present relationship between Ryder and Boris, but also his narrative of recollection of his parents.

This use of “doubles” can also be found in Ishiguro’s early work. The narrator of *A Pale View of Hills* is a Japanese woman in her fifties, Etsuko, now having lived in England for many years. She recollects the visit of her
second daughter, Niki, which evokes Etsuko’s repressed memories of her hometown, Nagasaki. The protagonist would not reveal the fact that she has concealed her painful memories. Her tone keeps calm even when she is indicating that her first daughter, Keiko, killed herself. Etsuko mainly tells the story of her friend, Sachiko, but readers gradually become aware of the similarities between the experiences of Sachiko and the narrator herself.

Etsuko is conscious of her memory’s unreliability. She mentions that “It is possible that my memory of these events will have grown hazy with time, that things did not happen in quite the way they come back to me today” (41). Odd points of her narrative are often concerned with Sachiko’s daughter, Mariko. The relationship between Sachiko and Mariko seems to reflect that of Etsuko and Keiko. Although Etsuko avoids direct references to Keiko, she is obsessed by the motif of death of a child. Etsuko recalls in their neighborhood,

Received with more urgency were the reports of the child murders that were alarming Nagasaki at the time . . . When a third victim, another little girl, had been found hanging from a tree there was near-panic amongst the mothers in the neighbourhood. (100)

During Niki’s visit, Etsuko dreams of a girl on a swing she saw the other day. However, Etsuko realizes that it was not that girl (55), and the girl must be Mariko (96). In conversation with Niki, she says that “. . . the little girl isn’t on a swing at all. It seemed like that at first. But it’s not a swing she’s on” (96). These images of girls or ropes repeatedly appear in the novel. Her agitation is most obviously shown when she persuades Mariko to move to America. She says, “. . . if you don’t like it over there, we can always come back” (emphasis added 173). This comment overlaps with her relationship with Keiko. In the same scene, Mariko asks an odd question: “Why are you holding that?” (173). This remark alludes to another scene when Etsuko searched for Mariko. To Etsuko who is holding “an old piece of rope,” Mariko asks, “Why have you got the rope?” showing “[s]igns of fear” (83-4). Etsuko’s sense of guilt takes shape in the Sachiko-Mariko story and the motif of the rope. This mistaken memory indicates the process that Etsuko has repeatedly overlooked and edited in her memory of Nagasaki.

Another characteristic which indicates the frailty of Etsuko’s narrative is
the blank in her memory. Blind spots of Etsuko’s narrative are indicated from other characters’ words. In the novel, Etsuko describes one conversation with her father-in-law, Ogata-San, in Nagasaki. The lack of any memory of her playing the violin shortly after the bombing indicates the unreliability of Etsuko’s memory and the process of her reconstructing her past.

“. . . you [Etsuko] were so devoted. I remember when you used to play in the dead of night and wake up the house.” . . .

“What was I like in those days, Father? Was I like a mad person?”

“You were very shocked, which was only to be expected. We were all shocked, those of us who were left. Now, Etsuko, let’s forget these things. I’m sorry I ever brought up the matter.” (57-8)

Etsuko could not recollect how she spent her days after the war. This indicates that she has difficulty confronting her painful experiences. Because she has not fully experienced the sudden event, her mind comes back to the past point again and again. Cathy Caruth remarks that the survivor repeats the painful memory because he or she “missed” the experiences:

The shock of the mind’s relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the missing of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known. (Caruth 62)

Ryder’s Isolation and Forgetfulness

The absence of the incident in Nagasaki in A Pale View of Hills is similar to that of The Remains of the Day. Stevens’s narrative strangely neglects a major historical event. His statements indicate that this journey takes place during the period from the ending of July to the beginning of August in 1956. However, the novel lacks any reference to the Suez Crisis in July 1956: “[n]ot only is this the biggest foreign affair since September 1939, it means the end of Stevens’s world” (Sutherland 188). Blind spots have been a notable characteristic of Ishiguro’s narrators preceding The Unconsoled. In A Pale View of Hills, Etsuko’s memory during the war is perplexingly tangled with
her regret about Keiko. Odd points of Etsuko’s narrative indicate not only that she has difficulties in confronting her regret for Keiko, but also that she cannot share the painful experiences during the war even with her family.

Ishiguro’s protagonists face difficulties in placing their personal past within the public memory of the community. This conflict is represented throughout his early four works from *A Pale View of Hills* to *The Unconsoled*. James M. Lang notes this shared motif: “[o]ne of the structuring conflicts of each of his novels emerges from the main character[s] struggle – usually unsuccessful – to reconcile his private memories with the public memories of the nation and his fellow citizens.” Etsuko suffers from the past event because she could not fully capture nor share the memory with her family or other characters. Though *A Pale View of Hills* employs a different style from *The Unconsoled*, both works display the narrators’ mind using mirror characters and how even distant memories continue to exert influence on their present.

*The Unconsoled* represents isolation from the community in an allegorical style. Like Etsuko’s narrative, Ryder is haunted by his past. Because his inner world is largely shaped by childhood memory, his telling has many odd points and unexplainable blanks. As well as these personal memories having an effect on the narrative, the conflicts in the community are also important in *The Unconsoled*. Looking closely at his process of encountering the past, this centres on Ryder’s relationship with his family and the “city.” The inhabitants have complicated feelings toward the city’s historical figure of “Sattler.” One of the citizens repeatedly refers back to incidents about him which occurred nearly a century ago: “. . . Sattler has gained a place in the imaginations of citizens here. His role, if you like, has become mythical” (374). It gradually starts to become clear that the “crisis” in the city concerns remembering and forgetting these past events.

One of the citizens, Pedersen, explains about his past mistake and claims, “Our city is close to crisis. There’s widespread misery” (99). From this point, it starts to become clear that the crisis for which Ryder is expected to offer some advice is about musical and cultural values. Ryder meets an excluded musician, Christoff, in the later part of the novel. He says, in spite of Pedersen’s circle, the members of his group “understand something of how the modern forms work” (187). He emphasizes the locality of the matter: “Each community has its own history, its own special needs” (187). Pedersen is eager
to expel the person and the values which he thinks misled the city, and states: “He and everything he has come to represent must now be put away in some dark corner of our history” (100). What to preserve and what to forget about the past preoccupy the city’s inhabitants.

Ryder faces difficulties to cope with the memory of the community in *The Unconsoled*. As the characters and plot involve his private memory on the whole, his recollection collaborates with narratives of the other people who are close to him. He sometimes feels discomfort confronting other people’s memories. The odd mood underlying in the novel is characterized through Ryder’s isolation and fragmented memory of the city. However, these are strangely separated, and are never connected with each other. Because of this, Ryder has a problem that he could not place his personal experience successfully in his supposed hometown. Lang notes the dilemma of Ishiguro’s protagonists facing their reevaluation of their personal past and its negotiation with historical record: “. . . he [Ryder] can never calibrate his memory with the memories of the public or of individuals around him . . .” (“Public Memories, Private History”). Lang then notices the episode in the novel concerning a local journalistic photograph in front of the “monument.”

Ryder’s discomfort is displayed by his conflict with the city’s memorial. Having arrived the city, he realizes there are many plans of interviews and receptions by journalists during his stay. They take photographs of him by the wall of a building, an incident without any particular significance at the time (182). In a later meeting, he is accused about the photo by people who saw it in the morning newspaper. One of them says to him, “Standing in front of the Sattler monument! Smiling like that!” (370). This strengthens the difference between local inhabitants and an “outsider” like Ryder. The statue represents their difficulty of evaluating past events in the present.

Similar memorials also appear in Ishiguro’s earlier book, in which they represent the narrator’s feelings of discomfort in the community. In *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko’s depiction of the Peace Park in Nagasaki is associated more with her personal memory rather than the public event. She describes it in the narrative: “the memorial itself – a massive white statue in memory of those killed by the atomic bomb – presiding over its domain” (137). She cannot smoothly connect the monument and the historical moment she has experienced. It rather evokes personal recollections of the day with Ogata-San.
to her. She says,

It was always my feeling that the statue had a rather cumbersome appearance, and I was never able to associate it with what had occurred that day the bomb had fallen, and those terrible days which followed. (137-8)

This episode displays the conflict between personal memory and the official version of it (Molino 333). It shows the impossibility for others to represent the individual memory of survivors. The discomfort Etsuko felt about the memorial is inherited in Ryder’s distorted narrative, which represents the struggle between his memory and the community.

In the novel, Ryder is always an “outsider” and isolated from local issues. He feels discomfort in connecting to the city’s local community, and moreover, he cannot find any way to relate to his family. At the ending of *The Unconsoled*, his seeming wife, Sophie says to Ryder, “You were always on the outside of our love. Now look at you. On the outside of our grief too. Leave us” (532). He could not communicate with either people close to him or the community to which he belongs.

The failure of Ryder’s attempt to find a place in close relationships is represented in Brodsky’s case. The alcoholic conductor is asked by Ryder about the pain in his leg, and replies that “It’s a wound . . . Perhaps that’s why I drank so much. If I drink, I don’t feel it” (308). Ryder continues to ask him:

‘You’re referring to a wound of the heart, Mr Brodsky?’
‘. . . No, no, I meant simply, I had a wound. I was injured, very badly, many years ago. In Russia. The doctors weren’t so good, they did a bad job. And the pain’s been bad. It’s never healed properly. I’ve had it for so long now, it still hurts me.’ (308)

He knows it would not be cured completely, and seems even to cherish his wound: “The music, even when I was a conductor, I knew that’s all it was, just a consolation. It helped for a while. I liked the feeling, pressing the wound, it fascinated me . . .” (313). Brodsky seeks recovery of the relationship with Miss Collins to get over the past, but at the same time, he recognizes its importance
to him. He struggles to console himself for his “wound,” but at the last moment, Miss Collins left him saying that he loves only his injury: “That’s your real love, Leo, that wound, the one true love of your life!” (498). Ryder’s difficult childhood memory represented in Boris and Stephan continues to have influence on the portrait of his older stages of life in Brodsky.

One of the critics relates the “wound” in The Unconsoled to the “loss of equilibrium” Ishiguro has experienced when his family extended their stay in the UK and did not return to Nagasaki (Teo 41). In one interview, Ishiguro refers to writing as a “therapy.” He claims that writers create as a kind of consolation:

. . . I think a lot of them [writers] do write out of something that is unresolved somewhere deep down and, in fact, it’s probably too late ever to resolve it. Writing is kind of consolation or a therapy. . . . The wound has come and it hasn’t healed, but it’s not going to get any worse; yet the wound is there. (Conversations 85)

The narrative of The Unconsoled dramatises this process of consolation. Although the narrative technique differs, the representation of traumatic memory has been the dominant motif of Ishiguro’s fiction in A Pale View of Hills and The Unconsoled. The narrative’s strangeness suggests Ryder’s psychological difficulties.

Ryder’s narrative of recollection is related to the forgetting of the past. In the novel, especially in Brodsky’s case, forgetfulness works as one form of consolation. Laurence J. Kirmayer states that, “Narrative of trauma may be understood then as cultural constructions of personal and historical memory” (175), and that paradoxically remembering traumatic memory is to forget it:

Reconstructions of traumatic memory involve the building up of a landscape of local coherence to better manage or contain it, to present it convincingly to others and, finally, to have done with it. (182)

He examined narratives of victims of childhood abuse and Holocaust survivors, distinguishing repression and dissociation. According to him, repression requires a certain time gap after painful experiences, while
dissociation “implies a narrowing or splitting of consciousness so that some memories may be put aside” (179). Those fragmentary memories are restored and reworked over and over, like that of Ryder’s. He claims both dissociative disorder patients and Holocaust victims require a contemporary social space to recall the memory, whether a private space or public one.

Trauma shared by a whole community creates a potential public space for retelling. If a community agrees traumatic events occurred and weaves this fact into its identity, then collective memory survives and individual memory can find a place (albeit transformed) within that landscape. (189-190)

As Brodsky seeks consolation from people close to him, the unreliability of Ryder’s narrative displays his discomfort in his family and his seeming hometown. As Etsuko in A Pale View of Hills cannot share her sadness with anyone, Ryder does not share his past even with his family.

In The Buried Giant, forgetfulness plays an important role. The story takes place in medieval England and is written with “fantasy” motifs. Marie Arana calls The Buried Giant “a spectacular, rousing departure from anything Ishiguro has ever written, and yet a classic Ishiguro story.” The two older travelers, Axl and Beatrice, wonder how to find their son, who has mysteriously left them for a long time. Through the journey, they find out that the villages they have gone through are affected by forgetfulness. When the “mist” is taken away, Axl realizes an important change in the relationship with his wife as they discover painful memories they have forgotten. This novel is written in the third person, and this narrative change means a shift of focus from personal past to memory in a close relationship. Though the novel’s focus shifts, the theme of memory and forgetfulness is inherited from his former novel. As well as in The Unconsoled, this novel depicts memory and forgetfulness in a close relationship.

Ryder’s isolation and forgetfulness are inherited from Ishiguro’s former works. The past is foregrounded in the novel in which characters are negotiating to place it within public memories. The narrator has experiences of a “wound,” too painful to face, and could not find any way to overcome the trauma. Ryder’s retelling of his story is an act of consolation for his traumatic
memory reflected outwards on others.

Although *The Unconsoled* employs a different style from Ishiguro’s former novels, the narrative of this novel shows the unreliability and fragility of the protagonist’s memory as much as his other works. The time and spatiality of *The Unconsoled* seem to lack reality because they frame Ryder’s inner process of recollection. Through mirrored characters and their narratives, fragmentary memories of Ryder’s childhood are gradually represented, and their importance for his present experience is revealed. In *The Buried Giant*, the frailty of memory has a similarly crucial role to give consolation and restore human relationships.

**Works Cited**


