

## **Ignorance, Bliss? Collective Memory and Cultural Narrative in *The Buried Giant* and *The Wake***

In this paper I compare tales of two societies whose endurance hinges on memory loss. In order to persevere, the members of these societies must forget their histories and origins – their cultural narratives.

The Britons and Saxons in Ishiguro's novel, *The Buried Giant*, experience mysterious memory loss that they attribute to a mist. The spell they are under is meant to maintain peace, as it prevents them from remembering the atrocities that took place when they were at war.

In Snyder and Murphy's graphic novel, *The Wake*, mankind is revealed to be alien rather than indigenous to Earth. Tears are the means by which our predecessors forgot the genocide they committed millennia ago. Memory loss allows them to replace the truth of their brutal colonizing with the false notion that they are native to the planet.

Notwithstanding their differences in tone, genre, and medium, the two tales speak to the same issue: the loss of collective memory. Rather than being *constructed on* underlying cultural narratives, these tales imagine what happens when we *cannot access* our underlying cultural narratives, and proceed according to a history that is alternate in that the actual one is forgotten. I explore what these stories impart about the need to know and the desire to forget. I submit that while the authors posit fantastical reasons for the memory loss, their consequent examination of the relationship between collective memory and cultural narrative bears relevance to the non-fantastical world as well.