

The Buried Giant Study Guide

The Buried Giant by Kazuo Ishiguro

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Plot Summary

The Buried Giant, by Kazuo Ishiguro takes place during a period of time in which an uneasy peace exists between the Saxons and Britons. Axel and Beatrice, an elderly Briton couple, decide to embark on a journey to visit a son whom they haven't seen for years and can barely remember. Their memory loss isn't simply because they haven't seen him for a long time, though. Everyone in the land suffers from an unexplained loss of memory.

In addition to finding their son, Beatrice also wants to consult a medicine woman to get treatment for a pain in her side. She tells her husband that it is nothing severe, but she would still like the woman to examine it. The two finish their chores and leave. Beatrice thinks she knows the location of their son's village, so she takes the lead. Along the way, rain forces them to take shelter in the ruins of a villa. There, they meet a boatman who ferries people from the mainland to an island and an old widow who haunts the boatman because he took her husband to the island and left her behind on the mainland.

As they talk, Axel and Beatrice learn that the boatman can take couples across together, but only after the answers to his questions convince him of their true devotion to each other. Beatrice worries that because she and Axel have no memories of their past, they won't be able to answer the boatman's questions when the time comes and will not be able to prove that they should cross the river together. Axel tries to reassure her.

The couple continues on their journey. They finally reach the Saxon village where the medicine woman lives. The climate is tense there, however, because of an ogre attack on a group of men and a young boy, Edwin, who had been out fishing. One of the boy's uncles manages to survive and return to the village to report the situation. While other members of the outing are not survivors, there is hope that his nephew is still alive as he was kidnapped by the ogres. A Saxon warrior, Master Wistan, happens to be there. He and two of Edwin's other uncles go to search for him. He returns with Edwin, but the pagan villagers shun the boy because he has a wound that they think will turn him into a fiend in the future. Since Edwin can't stay there, Ivor, a village elder, suggests that Master Wistan, along with Axel and Beatrice, escort him to Axel's and Beatrice's son's Christian village. Everyone agrees, and the four continue their journey together.

Their next destination is a monastery where a monk, Father Jonus, lives. The medicine woman in the Saxon village suggested that Beatrice visit him as he is even wiser than she. They have to be careful, though, because if they get lost, they could find themselves in the she-dragon, Querig's, territory.

As they travel to the monastery, they meet Sir Gawain, an old Knight who's the nephew of the now deceased King Arthur. Both Wistan and Gawain seem to recognize Axel, but Sir Gawain denies that he does so when asked by Wistan. While they are together, Master Wistan admits that he's there to kill Querig. Sir Gawain says his mission is to do the same.



Axl, Beatrice, Master Wistan, and Edwin continue on to the monastery. After a wait, they finally get to see Father Jonus who examines Edwin's wound and Beatrice's ailment. While talking to him, they also discover that Querig is the cause of the memory loss (which they called the mist). Beatrice encourages Wistan to go ahead with his mission to kill the she-dragon. While the group is at the monastery, soldiers come looking for Wistan and Edwin. Wistan battles them while a monk comes to help the other travelers escape. He takes them to a tunnel that is supposed to be an escape route. However, in reality, is the home of a beast who would have most likely killed them without Sir Gawain's intervention.

After they defeat the beast, Edwin returns to the monastery to find Master Wistan. Axl and Beatrice continue their journey alone, along with a goat a girl gives them. Their goal is to reach Querig and leave a goat, which contains poison, for her to feast upon. They run into Sir Gawain again. He takes them to Querig's territory where Master Wistan and Edwin catch up with them.

Sir Gawain finally admits that he's there to save Querig and ends up giving his life for her in a fight with Master Wistan. After killing Sir Gawain, Wistan completes his mission and kills Querig. He then warns Axl and Beatrice of the war to come now that the Saxons will remember that the Britons had attacked an unprotected village full of women, children, and the elderly who thought they were safe because of the deal Axl had brokered.

Axl and Beatrice have regained their memories. When they meet the boatman again, he learns about the time Beatrice cheated on Axl, why their son had left, and what had caused the son's death. He also learns that Axl had forbidden Beatrice to visit his grave.

The boatman says that the two will walk together on the island, but he'll have to take Beatrice first and come back for Axl. Beatrice convinces Axl to let her go. They part, and Axl walks to the shore without turning back even though the boatman tells him to wait for him to return.



Part 1: Chapters 1 -- 2

Summary

The Buried Giant is set in the sixth century A.D. in the British Isles. It's a time when ogres roam the land. It's also a time when an elderly couple, Axl and Beatrice, live on the outskirts of their warren. As they live far away from the fire that keeps other residents warm, their home is cold. They aren't even allowed to have a candle due to a decision made by the warren's council for fear that the couple might knock the candle over. So, they live in the dark once night falls.

One spring morning, Axl gets up before his wife and comes to the decision to look for a son whom he seems to remember. For some reason, he doesn't know his son's name, where he is, or why he's no longer with him and his wife. He can't ask anyone because none of the other warren's inhabitants remember anything either. A forgetfulness that the couple call "the mist" envelops the entire community. Community members can barely even remember what happened a few minutes before. The forgetfulness, which afflicts everyone in the land, has existed several months.

When Beatrice wakes up, Axl tells her that it's time for them to begin the journey to look for their son. Beatrice has wanted to do so for a long time, but until now, Axl has always resisted. Beatrice agrees. Like Axl, Beatrice doesn't remember much about their son, but she thinks she knows the village he is in. She's travelled outside the warren more than Axl, so she will take the lead.

In Chapter 2, Axl and Beatrice begin their journey. As they walk, Beatrice always goes first as evil prey tends to attack those in the back of the party. Knowing this, Beatrice constantly asks Axl whether he's still there. With clouds rolling in, it's obvious that rain is coming. Beatrice knows of a ruined villa where they can take shelter. When they get there, they find an old woman with a rabbit and a boatman. The woman comes to haunt the boatman because he didn't take her to the island with her husband. She waited for him to come back and take her. When he did return without her husband, he gave her the rabbit that he was going to eat for dinner because he felt sorry for her.

As they talk, Axl and Beatrice find out that it is rare that both husband and wife go to the island together. Those who do have an especially strong bond. To decide if they can cross together, the boatman asks them questions. The woman with the rabbit did not have a strong enough bond with her husband. Finally, the couple convince the woman to leave. The boatman is grateful.

When the boatman speaks of war during a conversation with Axl and Beatrice, something stirs in Axl's memory. Beatrice wants to know more about the questions the boatman asks. Finally, they leave. Since they have no memory of the past, Beatrice is worried about the questioning she and Axl might face from the boatman or anyone else. Axl tries to reassure her.



Analysis

Chapters 1 - 2 establish the story's setting. The language and style create the dreamlike, mystical mist which the main characters, Axl and Beatrice, experience. The setting itself introduces the theme of whether or not it is good to forget the past. It also helps readers feel what the inhabitants of the land are feeling. There is a series of flashbacks. The narrator begins by talking about Britain, in general, during the sixth century. Then, the narration flashes to Axl and Beatrice and mentions the forgetfulness in the land. The couple's journey, which is the matter at hand, resumes.

When Beatrice and Axl first leave on their quest, they talk about their son. However, this reason for the journey seems to be forgotten when the conversation turns to whether Beatrice and Axl will be able to pass a test to show the strength of their love. Their concern seems unusual because at this point no one has mentioned testing the love between Beatrice and Axl. Beatrice's worry is a premonition of the time when she and Axl will have to answer to the boatman.

There is another premonition in the scene at the old villa. When the boatman talks about the war, Axl feels his memory stirring. This poses several questions. Was Axl involved in a war in the past? Is there something about this that tore the bond between Axl and Beatrice? Is this why Beatrice is worried? Is it not because they don't remember, but because the questioning might bring with it memories that show that the two were not always so close?

The section shows that Axl and Beatrice are not as forgetful as some. They both remember that they have a son. Beatrice remembers the path she's taken with other women. Does she also remember something that broke her bond with Axl?

Chapters 1 -2 also unveil the theme of the journey. On the surface, the couple is going on a journey looking for their son. However, the journey is also one of self-discovery. The conversation with the boatman implies that this will be the case. Self-discovery for Axl and Beatrice means reinstating their memories so that they can remember their true selves and the relationships they have experienced.

By exploring the theme of whether or not it is good to forget the past, readers wonder if there is war in Axl's background. If his memory returns, will Axl be as gentle as he is now? Will Beatrice still be close to him if she remembers his war-related past? Are the two really better off the way they are now?

This section demonstrates the close bond between Axl and Beatrice. For example, they are happy with each other even though they live in the cold and dark. Beatrice waits for Axl before looking for her son, even though she wants to do so before he is ready. Beatrice worries about the two of them being separated, and Axl assures her that this will not happen. Axl lets Beatrice go first as prey usually grabs the person at the rear of the party. Beatrice wants to always know that Axl is still there, partly because she knows this fact, but also because she wants to know if their bond is still tight. Is he still with her on her journey? Is it still their journey?



Discussion Question 1

Why do Axl and Beatrice live on the outskirts of the warren?

Discussion Question 2

Axl and Beatrice remember that they have a son, but they don't remember any details about him. Is it a good idea for them to go looking for him? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

If Axl and Beatrice had to cross the river now, would they go together? Why or why not?.

Vocabulary

tranquil, celebrated, desolate, uncultivated, ogre, desperation, obscure, blundering, warren, congregated, gnaw, episode, skepticism, promontory, deviated, broached, commotion, entreaty, weeping, stamina, assailant, conversed, antidote, respite, inkling, judiciously



Part 1: Chapters 3 -- 5

Summary

In Chapter 3, Axl and Beatrice continue toward the Saxon Village where, in addition to taking shelter, Beatrice can consult a medicine woman she knows. Unlike their warren, the Saxons have houses like one would expect to see in a village instead of ones that are dug into the hillside. Still, the Saxons protect their village by surrounding it with tall fences and trenches. When Axl and Beatrice arrive, they find another type of defense -- guards. Beatrice talks to them, and they let the couple enter the village. Beatrice realizes that something strange is happening. The atmosphere is different from the times when she was there in the past.

They wander along until they find the woman Beatrice seeks. She and Beatrice leave Axl and talk. While Axl is waiting, he sees a warrior, who appears to be about 30 and exudes authority. The warrior is with two other men who seem to be scared. Beatrice and the medicine woman come out and she tells Beatrice, who in turn tells Axl, what is going on. It turns out that a man had been fishing with his nephew and brother when two ogres had attacked them. They had killed the man's brother, injured the man, and kidnapped the man's 12 year old nephew. The warrior and two of the boy's uncles are going to find the boy.

Axl and Beatrice decide to find the place where they are going to stay for the night. They end up finding themselves surrounded by a group of Saxon men. The situation becomes tense. An elder in the village appears and orders everyone back to their places. The elder is bothered by the Saxons harassing Axl and Beatrice. However, he is even more concerned that Axl and Beatrice forgot what there were supposed to be doing. He takes the couple to his home. He tells them that it would be best for them to stay there for the night. During the evening, they discuss the forgetfulness that has taken over the land. They comment that younger people seem to suffer more from it than the older generation. Beatrice wants to know what causes it and talks to Axl about it when Ivor leaves. While she talks about the mist, Axl thinks about the warriors. He remembers to ask Beatrice about her pain. She now wants to go to see a monk, Father Jonus, who has even more healing powers than the medicine woman. Going to see the monk will add time to their trip, and they will have to go up a mountain. When Ivor returns he tells them that they also have to be careful because they will be in Querig's territory. He says that the she-dragon doesn't show herself much; but, he blames the evil in the land (like the ogres that kidnapped Edwin) on her. He tells them about an old knight, Sir Gawain. Ivor thinks that Sir Gawain wants to kill the dragon. Ivor also tells them that a stranger had once suggested that maybe the people had done something so bad that God himself had forgotten their past. Later that evening, the warrior returns with the boy. People aren't happy to see the boy, though.

The next morning Axl wakes up first. He is a bit worried because it takes Beatrice some time to wake up. She finally awakens, and Ivor comes back with the warrior they had



seen the night before, Master Wistan. He's a Saxon, but he also understands the Britons. When he meets Axl, he stares at him. Then, he apologizes for doing so. Axl notices that Master Wistan wears his sword more like a Briton than a Saxon. Axl tells him that he and Beatrice plan to take the mountain route.

They go to eat and find out that the village is afraid of Edwin because he has a small wound. They are pagans and think that Edwin was bitten by a fiend and will one day turn into one himself. Ivor tells them that he and Master Wistan think that Wistan and Edwin should go with them when they leave. When Ivor leaves them alone, Axl and Beatrice ponder over what man could have done that was so bad that even God would want to forget it.

Axl tells her about a memory he has about a man who had been enchanted by Beatrice. Beatrice thinks that must have made Axl jealous, but he says he was proud. She says that she barely remembers the green cloak he says she had and that she remembers that when she lost it, she had blamed him for it. She's happy that some of their memories are returning.

They run into Master Wistan. Axl talks to him. He tells Axl that the elders thought that it would be best for him to go with them and leave Edwin at their son's Christian Briton village. Axel agrees, and the four leave.

In Chapter 4, Edwin serves as a lookout. He remembers his experience with the ogres. They did not give him the wound, but Master Wistan told him not to tell anyone that.

In Chapter 5, the travelers run into some soldiers. Axl thinks that after they explain why they are there, the soldiers will let them pass. Master Wistan doesn't agree. He pretends to be a mute half-wit. He says that Axl should tell them that he and Edwin are brothers who have been given to him to pay off a debt. Axel tells his story. As he watches the soldiers decide whether or not to let them pass, he thinks he remembers being in a similar situation once as a soldier who seems to want to say something but holds his tongue.

The grey-haired soldier, who is the leader, takes kindly to Beatrice and lets them pass. As they continue their journey, Beatrice, who is in front of Axl asks him whether he's still there. She also says that she wants to have a candle when they return to their warren. She blames her pain on not having light. The next person they meet is Sir Gawain. Master Wistan knows that Sir Gawain is King Arthur's nephew and admits that he admires the deceased king even though he's a Saxon. He asks Sir Gawain whether he recognizes Axl. The old knight says no, but his facial expression suggests otherwise.

The grey-haired soldier finds the group. He says that he had let the travelers pass because he had forgotten what he was supposed to do. Then he remembered and came looking for Master Wistan and Edwin. He asks for Sir Gawain's help, but he refuses. Finally, the grey-haired soldier and Master Wistan fight. Master Wistan kills the grey-haired soldier.



Analysis

Chapters 3 - 5 explore some of the differences between the Saxons and the Britons. The Saxon village is above ground. The Saxons are pagans who believe in superstitions. For example, they believe if one is bitten by a fiend, he will turn into one. This village is open to Britons and Saxons. One of the elders, Ivor, is Briton and is married to a Saxon woman. This is not Beatrice's first visit to the village.

The themes of bias, prejudice, and discrimination are connected to Ivor's position as an elder in a Saxon village and his accepted marriage to a Saxon woman. Ivor is a Briton, yet the Saxons respect him as a person. The mist may have helped the Saxons accept Ivor because they do not remember their history with the Britons. Ivor might not be respected for his character if the Saxons remember that they are supposed to hate all Britons because of what a group of Britons did to a group of Saxons. Also, Ivor might look upon his contributions to the village differently if his memory returns. Regaining memories might very well prove to be a burden that prevents people from living peacefully.

What's more just being from the same group as someone else doesn't mean that they are immune from prejudice within their own group. Edwin is Saxon, yet they disown him. The elders think that he would actually be better off in a Christian Briton village.

The section also shows how the mist affects people. The soldiers are on watch in the Saxon village due to an important threat, yet, they forget what it is. Readers are also given something to think about. God had also forgotten because man had done something so bad He didn't want to remember.

In addition, readers wonder about Axl's past as Wistan seems to recognize him. Master Wistan is such a duty bound, goal achieving person, readers are likely to believe that if he thinks he has seen Axl before, he probably has. After all, Axl's memory is not reliable as he suffers from the mist.

Beatrice is not immune from memories that make readers wonder if she's the devoted wife she seems to be. The grey-haired knight seems to have flirted with her, and Axl remembers a time when Beatrice had enchanted a man. Her main question was whether he had been jealous. She said that she remembered blaming him for the loss of her green cloak. Is Beatrice vain? Does she welcome attention from men? Is she not the mild-manner elderly lady readers have seen thus far? The journey continues to exchange innocence with awareness. Both Axl and Beatrice are becoming more aware of their past.

These chapters also highlight the fact that the pacing of the novel never really changes. When the grey-haired soldier comes, a typical action packed novel would build up the scene. Here, however, the pace never quickens. This could be because the narrator is telling the story of Axl's and Beatrice's journey. They are old, and Beatrice is sick. They just want to survive and continue on their journey. From their perspective these fights, even though they are to the death, don't hold excitement.



Discussion Question 1

What do you think the people in the land could have done that was so bad that even God would want to forget it?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Edwin became loyal to Master Wistan so quickly?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think that Master Wistan and Axl met in the past? Why or why not? Does Sir Gawain know him?

Vocabulary

fiend, kin, bandits, menace, pestilence, affliction, nonchalantly, contempt, palpably, entreaty, benevolent, impertinence, imposition, provision, foreboding, tedious, imposition, tethered, puncture, superficial, gesticulating, coarse, ominous, arduous, prosperous, scoundrel. aghast



Part II: Chapters 6 -- 8

Summary

In Chapter 6, the travelers make it to the monastery. Axl can't sleep because he's bothered by the birds that are flying around and by Wistan, who is cutting wood. Father Jonus told Wistan not to cut wood, but he refuses to stop. In general, the atmosphere at the monastery is tense; but, they have to wait before they can talk to Father Jonus.

As he tries to sleep, Axl remembers what had happened from the time they had buried the grey-haired soldier to now. Even though Sir Gawain had tried to get Wistan to return home, he had insisted on going to the monastery with Axl and Beatrice. He said after that he would be on his way. Sir Gawain had given Wistan a hostile look.

Axl's thoughts go back to two times in his more distant past. One time was when he had tried to protect some shepherds from a violent soldier and the other was when he had met Beatrice. He thinks of the latter because of the way the grey-haired soldier had treated her and how she had smiled when he had said kind words about her.

To keep watch, Axl returns to the present where Master Wistan is still cutting wood. Axl also has Edwin on the look out. Earlier, Wistan had told Axl that he thought that the monastery had once been a Saxon fort. He talks of hatred. Axl finds it hard to believe that people could hate so much and says that it's all in the past anyway. Sir Wistan had given him a strange look and then told him where he thought he had seen him before. The man hadn't been a soldier, but he had carried a sword and had been impressive and kind. After telling Axl this, he had said that he must have been mistaken, though. He had gone on to say that he might continue to train Edwin instead of leaving him in Axl's son's village. Axl was not happy to hear this.

Edwin had come to them and shown them a cage. Wistan said that he had seen something like that before and thought that it was used by the monks to do penance. As they talk, they notice the silent monk. The monk has already gotten Beatrice and he takes them to Father Jonus.

Father Jonus' appearance and health had surprised the group. He was covered with sores from doing penance in the cage. After having a discussion about religion with Wistan, he looks at Edwin's wound, after first having a discussion about religion with Wistan. He also examines Beatrice and tells her that she can go to her son without fear. While they are with him, Axl and Beatrice learn that Querig causes the mist. The monks are there to protect the she-dragon. Master Wistan still wants to kill her and says that people would come there to destroy him if they knew he was there. Beatrice is happy to know the cause of the mist and encourages Wistan to kill the she-dragon. Father Jonus asks her whether she's sure that she wants memories to come back.



In Chapter 7, soldiers invade the monastery looking for Wistan and Edwin. He leaves them. The trio meets Sir Gawain there. He tells them that the monks really sent them there so that a beast would kill them; but, since all monks don't think the same, another one led him there to help them. The beast comes, and they defeat it. Everyone escapes. Edwin goes back to look for Master Wistan.

Analysis

Chapters 6 - 8 demonstrate how unstable the peace is between the Saxons and the Britons and the extent that the Britons go to in order to make sure the two groups continue to live in peace. It also serves to tell readers more about Wistan's character and Axl's history. In addition, readers see a big difference between Saxons and Britons. Saxons are pagans, while the Britons are Christians.

The fact that Master Wistan has to be so watchful shows that even though there is supposed to be peace between the Saxons and Britons, his presence brings fear even though he has not shared his mission with everyone. He, in turn, does not trust anyone, so he is always alert. He's also full of hatred against the Britons, and it shows in this section.

There is more clearing of the mist as Axl remembers things, revealing parts of his past to readers as well. Readers learn a lot more when they find out what causes the mist and the fact that the monks are there to protect the she-dragon. This information serves to foreshadow what is to come as the monks let the forces know that Sir Wistan and Edwin are there.

Even though Sir Wistan vows to hate Britons, it's interesting that he doesn't always follow his own course. While he remembers Axl, he doesn't seem to hold any grudges against him. He first keeps Edwin away from Jonus; but, after having a discussion with him about religion, he respects him and lets him examine the boy. This could indicate hope for a lasting peace if there are enough people who can see through the hatred.

Although there is a glimmer of hope, no one can really trust anyone when the stakes are high. The monks lead Axl, Beatrice, and Edwin to the tunnel hoping that the beast will take care of them, so they don't have to. Perhaps, Master Wistan was right after all. The monks do something wrong, ask for penance, and then go on to do something else that is wrong.

This section also shows that people can have false memories. If the beast kills the three travelers, they will convince themselves of their own memory to make them look good.

When Father Jonus examines Beatrice he says that she can go to see her son in peace. Based on his questions and her responses, it seems that she's really sick, even though Axl wants to believe otherwise. Knowing that she is sick might be why she is so eager for them to have their memory back. They could let the boatman know how devoted they are to each other.



Discussion Question 1

How do you interpret Jonus's statement that Beatrice can join her son without fear?

Discussion Question 2

What is your opinion of Axl and Beatrice now compared to the beginning of the novel? Has it changed? If so how? If not, why not?

Discussion Question 3

If you were Axl and Beatrice who would you trust the most -- Sir Gawain or Master Wistan? Explain your answer.

Vocabulary

malevolent, subsequent, resounding, palpable, affection, hospitality, intrude, schemes, rudimentary, agility, outlandish, oblivious, slain, apprehension, camaraderie, leverage, tethered, conviction, pious, melancholic, complacent



Part III: Gawain's First Reverie -- Gawain's Second Reverie

Summary

In Gawain's First Reverie, the old knight learns that Wistan is still alive. He surprises himself by being happy because Master Wistan impresses him with his capabilities. He knows, though that he's still a problem.

As he rides on, he runs into a group of widows who taunt him because they know the cause of the mist and blame him for being left behind because they lacked memories to tell the boatman to prove their devotion to their husbands. As he passes them they call him a coward. This accusation causes memories to surface of how he had completed his mission for King Arthur and Merlin to make sure that the mist was in place (causing the death of some of his comrades) and then kept his promise to a young lady who wanted to seek revenge against a Saxon. While he was with her, Axl had come around. He blamed himself for what had happened when some Britons had attacked an unprotected village full of innocent people after he had won the trust of the Saxons and brokered a deal between the warring groups. Gawain had tried to console him, but Axl had said that he would go back and report what was going on to King Arthur. At the end of the chapter, Gawain tells the ladies to leave him alone. When it's time for him to go, he will do so peacefully; but, for now he has things to do.

In Chapter 10, Edwin meets up with Wistan who has a fever. Edwin apologizes for leaving him, and Edwin learns that Wistan values him for his hunter's gift as well as his courage. Edwin imagines how he will save his mother from the people holding her. Doing so, though, would mean deceiving Wistan.

Edwin wants to know why they had stayed even though Wistan suspected that the soldiers would come instead of leaving. Master Wistan explains his relationship with Lord Brennus and how it had opened his eyes so that now he knows that he can never trust Britons, even those who seem to be his friends. He says that he couldn't leave the monastery even though he had known the soldiers would come.

In Chapter 11, Axl and Beatrice continue on the journey without their provisions. Beatrice is cold and tired. They find a man who offers to tie two baskets together that they can use to go down the river. Beatrice begs Axl not to leave her. It turns out that she has a dream, or memory, in which he had done so in the past. In the end, Axl gets Beatrice out of the river to avoid the creatures in the river who try to convince him to leave her to them. They say that they will ease her suffering.

Chapter 12 chronicles Edwin's and Wistan's journey toward Querig. Edwin is moving so fast that Wistan ends up using a rope, like a leash, to control him. As they get closer to the she-dragon, Edwin apologizes and tells Master Wistan that he was looking for his



mother. Wistan forgives him and makes him promise that he'll hate all Britons in the future -- even those who are nice to him. Edwin doesn't understand why he should do that because Axl and Beatrice have been kind to them. However, he agrees to do so.

In Chapter 13, Beatrice must make her own promise to Axl. The two are traveling with a goat that was given to them by some children who want to use it to poison Querig so that their parents, who have forgotten them, will come back. As they continue, there's a sense of tension between the two of them, initiated by Beatrice who wants him to walk separately from her. The next day she seems to be better, but Axl makes her promise that she will keep what she's feeling for him in her heart even when their memories return. She promises to do so.

In Gawain's Second Reverie, Sir Gawain has come across Axl and Beatrice and picked them up. He also sees Wistan and Edwin and decides where to wait for them. As he does so, he thinks about the time he faced Querig and the death of a friend of his and what he will long for when he dies.

Analysis

This section lets readers learn more about Sir Gawain, Edwin, and Axl. It also gives readers a preview of how the people's personal lives will change once they have their memories back. Finally, readers must wrestle with the same question Edwin has. Should one hate people just because they are members of a group that history says you should hate? Are they any worse than members of one's own tribe who betray, such as Edwin betraying Wistan when he finds his mother or Beatrice alienating herself from Axl because of previous hurts.

Gawain's reveries provide information about Sir Gawain and Axl that no one would know otherwise because of lost memories. Those that see him might think that he's an eccentric, old knight. He tries to convince people of the truth that he is brave and that he continues to serve the land as he had done during King Arthur's lifetime. In addition, the only way readers can see Axl for what he was is through the eyes of someone who remembers. Gawain is one of those people. The mist is lifting for the readers. They see that Axl was always patient and kind, but he had had a very different life in the past. Readers can also understand why he may have chosen to forget his past. He walked away from King Arthur because he takes what the Britons did to the Saxons personally. He had gained the trust of the Saxons, but a few violent Britons had made it all worthless.

It appears that the relationship between Axl and Beatrice has not always been a smooth one. Readers, along with Axl and Beatrice, are slowly beginning to detect strife. Still, while Beatrice moves away, Axl does all he can to stay with her, including carrying her to save her from the river creatures.

As memories return and events unfold, readers find out that there may be betrayal in the history of Axl and Beatrice. Edwin has already admitted that he plans to deceive



Wistan in an effort to find his mother. Yet, Wistan is convinced that his enemies are Britons based on his experience when Britons had turned on him based on Brennus's actions. He had already admitted how everyone gave into Brennus to make him look good. Are the Britons who turned on him to please Brennus (as they all tried to please Brennus) any worse than the Saxon (Edwin) who puts his own wants in front of Wistan's until things don't work out and he doesn't find his mother? Beatrice starts to turn on her own husband (Briton vs Briton). Is being the member of a group above being part of a community of kind people no matter where they are from? Does simply forgetting ensure peace, or does one need to also forgive?

Discussion Question 1

Is the assessment that the widows make of Sir Gawain fair? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Gawain and Wistan remember the past, but Axl doesn't?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think is needed for people to trust members of groups who were once enemies?

Vocabulary

humility, stamina, exertion, abiding, bedraggled, canny, wayfarer, hags, laments, rebuke, disclosure, rough-hewn, impertinent, recompense, impersonate, disturbing, revulsion, countenance, sanctuary, marauding, peril



Part IV: Chapter 15 -- 17

Summary

In Chapter 15, Axl, Beatrice, and Sir Gawain arrive at Querig's cairn. Wistan and Edwin are not far behind. Gawain starts to talk about his and Axl's shared past. Axl begins to have feelings of anger and bitterness toward Beatrice. Axl finally tells Gawain that he doesn't want the memories Gawain keeps talking about. Instead, he wants to remember what Beatrice has been saying. Gawain keeps speaking. Then, all of a sudden Axl starts talking about the past.

Wistan and Edwin join them. While they are there, Axl exposes Gawain as the she-dragon's protector. Sir Gawain admits that this is the case and that the monks also helped by leaving food for Querig. The group also finds out that Wistan can withstand spells which is probably one of the reasons he has value. Gawain tries to get Wistan to change his mind, but he's determined to make sure that the Saxons remember and punish the Britons. Sir Gawain won't leave either; so, the two fight and Wistan wins. Afterwards, he kills the she-dragon. Before he leaves Axl and Beatrice, he tells them of the war to come.

In Chapter 16, Edwin, who was left tied to a tree, senses that Querig is dead. Axl and Beatrice tell him that Wistan is okay. They tell him to remember them and their friendship. As they speak, Edwin also remembers the vow he made to Wistan to hate all Britons. He wonders, however, whether he is supposed to hate Axl and Beatrice who have been so kind to him just because they are Britons. Axl raises his hand. Edwin wonders if it is to say goodbye or to detain him. He runs to Wistan.

In Chapter 17, Axl and Beatrice meet the boatman again. He assures them that they will be able to live on the island together. Beatrice wants him to question them. He does so because it is part of his job. During the questioning, the boatman learns why Axl's and Beatrice's son left, that he is dead, and that Beatrice had been unfaithful to Axl. Axl, though, tells the boatman that these dark areas make a whole and that God understands this.

The boatman says that he has to take Axl and Beatrice separately because of the water. He'll take Beatrice first. Axl doesn't trust him, but Beatrice says that she trusts him and Axl should let her go. Axl goes back to the shore. When the boatman tells him that he'll be back for him, Axl doesn't look back or acknowledge him.

Analysis

This section reaches both the physical and literal climax of the novel as well as its resolution.



The group has climbed to the top of the mountain. Now that everyone is finally in the vicinity of Querig, Sir Gawain must finally admit the truth. He is not there to slay Querig. He's one of her protectors. The monks have also been helping by feeding her. This information backs up what readers had already learned from Gawain when he had helped Axl, Beatrice, and Edwin get out of the tunnel at the monastery. Some of the monks wanted them all dead because they were trying to hurt the she-dragon. Others felt as if signs were showing that it was time to let whatever happened happen. Now that Sir Gawain has admitted his mission and won't walk away and Master Wistan remains intent on fulfilling his mission (as they are both honorable men), there is no choice but for the two of them to fight.

The truth also begins to emerge about Axl's past. However, Axl continues to remain evasive as to whether or not he remembers it. He says that he wants to remember what it is that Beatrice remembers. He wants to remember this because it is important to him. What's done is done. There is nothing he can do about it now, even though the experience of the Britons not honoring the treaty made him lose faith in the process. What he could influence with memories, however, was his future with his beloved wife. He knows that what she is remembering is bad. He wants to remember the same events so that they will be ready to talk to the boatman. This is in line with his choice earlier in life to leave the services of King Arthur and spend time with his wife.

The death of the she-dragon finally answers the question as to whether forgiving must accompany forgetting in order to maintain peace in nations and in households. Wistan is sure that war will break out now that the Saxons will remember what the Britons did to the unprotected village. Neighbors who once lived together in peace will start fighting each other. Axl also has a sense that the memory of bad events will negatively influence his relationship with Beatrice, someone so important to him that he left his job to be with her. Earlier, he had made her promise to not change her heart toward him no matter what she remembers.

The return of memory also brings with it the conflict that Edwin feels. Axl and Beatrice have been kind to him, but they are Britons. Must he hate them just because they are Britons? The couple tries to leave an imprint on Edwin by telling him to remember how kind they were to him. Still, when Axl raises his hand, Edwin sees a negative meaning to it. Was it meant to detain him?

Even Beatrice's view seems to have changed now that she has her memory back. Before, she begged Axl not to leave her. Now she is willing to go to the island alone.

Is peace possible when one forgets, but never forgives? The ending of this novel seems to say, "No."

This section also removes the mist for the readers. They know where everyone stands. They learn about the hidden past of Axl and Beatrice, and they understand what the search to rejoin their son really means.



Discussion Question 1

Is forgetting enough to heal old wounds, or does one also have to forgive?

Discussion Question 2

What does Axl's decision to leave King Arthur tell you about his character?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think Edwin's future entails? Support your answer.

Vocabulary

reticent, solemnity, tussling, sincere, avenge, betrayed, broodingly, oblivious, treachery, albeit, errand, comrades, solemnity, ceremonial, ascertain, emaciated, formidable, frankness, cunning, proximity, severed, despondent, meager, dispensation, estuary



Characters

Axl

Axl, an elderly man, is Beatrice's husband and one of the novel's protagonists. He is also a Briton. He and his wife live on the outskirts of their warren, away from the communal fire that keeps everyone else warm. The couple lives in the dark at night because the warren's council has deprived the couple of a candle out of fear that they will knock it over and start a fire.

His interaction with his equally elderly wife shows him to be kind, gentle, and loving, but still having a form of authority. He is also logical and reasonable. At the beginning of the novel, he lets his wife sleep even though he's eager to tell her about his decision -- to now look for their son. He agrees with her when she suggests that she should first talk to the guards when they go to the Saxon village. As Axl and his wife travel on their journey to look for their son, Axl always lets Beatrice go first because he knows that villains tend to attack those at the back of the party.

Even though he listens to his wife and supports her, he's still the authority figure. Beatrice had wanted to go and look for their son earlier, but Axl had said that they needed to wait for spring.

The search for their son is not going to be easy because they suffer from a loss of memory, as does everyone else in the land. They cannot remember their past, yet Axl does have glimmers of memory. He has the sense that he has a son even though he can't remember his name and where he currently lives.

As the journey of Axl and Beatrice progresses, the search for their son becomes intertwined with the quest to kill Querig, the dragon whose breath causes the mist that affects past memories. The journey also reveals Axl's past, which he starts to remember little by little prior to Querig's death. Through his mind fog, he begins to think that he could have had something to do with a war. In the end, he discovers that this is true. He is more than the sweet-natured elderly man readers now see.

Axl was once a diplomat who worked for King Athor. During the war between the Britons and the Saxons, he had negotiated a treaty. The treaty caused the Saxons to leave the women, the children, and the elderly in an unprotected village. Violent Britons later attacked the village.

It also turns out that Axl is on a journey to safely escort his wife to join their son in the after life. She crosses the river in peace. In the end, he knows, though, that it is not yet his time to go, so he returns to the mainland without looking back at the boatman.



Beatrice

Beatrice, an elderly woman, is Axl's wife and one of the novel's protagonists. She is also a Briton. She and her husband live on the outskirts of their warren, away from the communal fire that keeps everyone else warm. Axl and Beatrice live in the dark at night because the warren's council has deprived the couple of a candle out of fear that they will knock it over and start a fire. Beatrice is a feisty character though and when a young girl tries to sneak her a candle, she willingly takes it and tries to keep it. Her actions cause a commotion, and she finally has to give it up.

Trying to keep a candle she knows she's not supposed to have is only one example of her character. She also pushes to get what she wants throughout the novel. She wants to stop at the Saxon village; and, even though Axel suggests that they don't stop there, she pushes on, talks to the soldiers, and they get in. She wants to go to the monastery even though it will add time to their journey and means a hard climb. So they go. She wants to find the cause of the mist, and she does find it. When she finds it, she sets her mind on killing the she-dragon who causes the mist.

Her character also seems to attract people. A child tries to give her a candle. Widows warn her about the questions the boatman will ask. Men seem to like her. The grey-haired soldier gives her compliments, Sir Gawain looks at her kindly, and she has once had an affair, while married to Axl. Axl will do anything for her.

Still, she relies on her husband and always wants to know that he is always by her side. This holds true until the end when she's at peace with traveling before Axl to the island alone. The boatman says that she and Axl will walk on the island together, but that time is not now. Beatrice is okay with that.

Master Wistan

Master Wistan is a young warrior who makes his appearance volunteering to save a young boy named Edwin, who was kidnapped by ogres. Master Wistan later allows villagers to believe that an ogre gave Edwin a wound. When the villagers shun him because of the wound, volunteers to take him to the Christian village of Axl's and Beatrice's son.

Wistan's real goal is to kill the she-dragon, Querig, who breathes a mist that causes forgetfulness in the land. He wants the Saxons to remember what the Britons did to them and get revenge. In the end, he manages to kill the she-dragon.

Sir Gawain

Sir Gawain is the nephew of the deceased King Arthur. He's now old and has rusty armor, but he remains faithful to his pledge to King Arthur and strives to keep Querig safe. Even though Axl does not remember it, he and Gawain served under King Arthur



together. Sir Gawain accompanies Axl and Beatrice, knowing that they want to kill the she-dragon. He keeps his motive of protecting her a secret. Finally, he must admit his intentions. When he does, he and Master Wistan fight. Master Wistan emerges as the victor, and Sir Gawain dies.

Edwin

Edwin is a young, Saxon boy who lives with his aunt and uncle. People in his village tell him that his mother was abducted. Master Winston saves him after an ogre kidnaps him. When he returns with a bite that the villagers think he got from the ogres, the villagers are fearful that Edwin will turn into a fiend. They disown him. Master Winston takes him on as an apprentice. Edwin accompanies Axl, Beatrice, and Wistan on the journey to find Querig. He becomes loyal to Master Wistan. He leads them to the dragon.

Toward the end of the novel, Master Wistan makes him promise to hate all Britons, but Edwin wonders why he should hate those that have been kind to him, like Axl and Beatrice, just because they are Britons.

Querig

After the Briton soldiers violated the treaty Axl had negotiated, King Arthur ordered Merlin to cast a spell on Querig, a female dragon. The spell caused her breath to make everyone in the land forget what had happened. They forgot everything about their distant and recent past.

There are two thoughts of what to do to Querig. Sir Gawain wants to maintain peace by honoring Arthur's wish and keeping the she-dragon alive. Beatrice, Axl, and Wistan want her dead, but for different reasons. Beatrice wants to have their own personal memories back because memories define her life with Axl. She feels that she can't prove her love for Axl. Without their memories, she and her husband will not be able to answer the boatman's question. If that happens, the boatman will not take the two of them to the island together. Sir Wistan wants to kill Querig so that the Saxons will remember what the Britons did to them and seek revenge.

Querig finally dies at the hands of Wistan, and the mist disappears as does the peace that the land had endured due to the dragon's enchanted breath.

The Boatman

Axl and Beatrice first meet the boatman when they seek shelter from the rain during their journey to find their son. He's in the villa they take shelter. His job is to take people by ferry to an island. When couples want to cross together, he questions them to find out if their bond is close enough to warrant being together on the island. If it's not, he'll



take one person and not the other. One such woman is harassing him when Axl and Beatrice run into him at the villa.

They meet him again at the end of the novel. He questions the two of them now that their memories have returned. He says that the two of them will walk on the island together. However, at the end, the boatman says that the boat can only take one. Beatrice is in the boat, and she tells Axl that they need to trust the boatman. She convinces him to go back to the shore and wait for the boatman's return. The boatman tells Axl to wait for his return, but Axl keeps on walking.

In reality, the boatman is not simply a person taking people from the mainland to an island. He represents death. He transports the dead to their final resting place.

Father Jonus

Father Jonus is a wise, old monk with the reputation of being a healer. Beatrice wants to talk to him about both the pain in her side and how to get rid of the mist. When they find him, they see that he is dying from wounds he obtained during the torture the monks put themselves through as an act of penance.

The Widows

The widows are women who were left on the mainland after the boatman took their husbands to the island. They are dressed in black and are bitter because they've been left behind. Beatrice talks to one before she and Axl leave their village. Then both she and Axl talk to a widow who's harassing the boatman in the ruins of the villa. The woman's conversation causes Beatrice to fear that she and Axl will not be able to cross together when the time comes because they don't remember their past and won't be able to prove their tight bond. These women fuel Beatrice's desire to kill Querig so they get their memories back.

Girl with the Goat

During their journey, Axl and Beatrice meet a girl and her younger siblings who have a goat that they've been feeding plants that will poison those who eat the goats. They have already poisoned an ogre, who is on the verge of death. The girl begs Axl and Beatrice to take the goat and leave it on Querig's feeding ground. Their hope is that when the dragon eats it, she'll die. Her death will end the mist of forgetfulness. Then, the girl's parents, who have forgotten her and her siblings, will return.

While her character serves to guide Axl and Beatrice to the dragon's home, she also adds to the reader's experience of what it feels like to be a victim of the mist of forgetfulness. Axl and Beatrice refer to both the girl and the goat before they are introduced.

Ivor

Ivor is a Briton who married a Saxon and is the authority figure in the Saxon village Axl and Beatrice go to so that Beatrice can consult the medicine woman she knows there about the pain in her side. His status shows the power of the mist and brings to light the sad state of things to come in the future. Now that everyone has forgotten what went on between the Saxons and the Britons, the Saxons respect him, even though he is a Briton. Once memories return, however, the members of his village won't see him as Ivor. They will see him as a Briton, and thus, will hate him.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Goblet on Some Book Covers

Sir Gawain, who was one of King Arthur's knights, went in search for the Holy Grail. It's a cup that's an important part of the legend of King Arthur. It is said to have mythical powers that provide happiness, eternal youth, and an unlimited amount of food.

Every main character in this novel is on some sort of quest. Sir Gawain and Master Winston are looking for Querig. Axl and Beatrice are searching for their past through their memories and their son.

The Mist

The mist represents the collective forgetfulness from which the land suffers. Axl and Beatrice call the mist the loss of memory.

The Book's Title -- "The Buried Giant"

While there is literally a buried giant that Axl and Beatrice try not to disturb as they make their way on their journey, the concept of the buried giant also represents the giant issue between the Saxons and the Britons that has been buried due to the collective loss of memory that affects the land. The fact that the land's inhabitants can't remember or agree on the past allows the Saxons and the Britons to live side by side in peace. Once the people's memories surface, the land will have to bear the consequences, which will not be good.

Forgetfulness

The forgetfulness among the Saxons and the Britons represents nations that exist, but were once split by tribal wars. The need to artificially make people forget implies that the various tribes never naturally forgive and forget. Instead, some artificial method has to be initiated to make it possible for the different tribes to live side by side.

The Boatman

In Greek mythology, Charon is the ferryman of the dead. He takes them to the underworld, and they have to pay to go there. If they can't pay or they aren't buried, some say that they must roam the shores of the world of the living for a century. The boatman in the novel represents Charon. He takes people from the mainland to the island of the dead.



Sir Gawain

Sir Gawain represents the ambiguous nature of the past. People can remember the past in different ways. In their current situation, if citizens remember anything they are likely to remember the same events differently.

The River

The river represents the route one must cross to the land of the dead. The boatman ferries people across from the mainland to the island.

Querig

The name of the dragon begins with the letters "que" just like the word "question," and questions surround her and her existence as she sleeps, old and frail. These are possible questions that surround her. Is it right for her breath to erase memories? Should the current state of the land continue or should people get their memories back in spite of the consequences it may lead to?

The Landscape of the Novel

The landscape of ogres, giants, and dragons is obviously a fantasy element. The creatures' presence on the landscape can be compared to the difficult realities of life.

The Island

The island that the boatman takes people to is their final resting place. In fact, readers find out that Axl's and Beatrice's son is dead. So the whole trip to join him because he's waiting for them is a trip with the destination of the world of the dead.



Settings

Axl's and Beatrice's Warren

This readers first meet Axl and Beatrice in their warren. The warren serves to paint a picture of their characters and the situation in the land. The couple live on the outskirts of their warren. There they are safe. The warren's council is protective of the elderly coupled. This is demonstrated by the council forbidding the couple to have a candle for fear that Axl or Beatrice might accidentally set their home on fire. Since their home is not near the warren's fire, they are sometimes cold in their dark dwelling; but, they are safe.

The Ruins of the Villa

The Ruins of the Villa are an important setting because Axl and Beatrice first meet the boatman there. During that meeting, they learn what the fate of the spouse who isn't allowed to travel to the island with their partner. They also find out what couples need to do if they want the boatman to take them to the island together.

The Saxon Village

The Saxon village is where Axl and Beatrice meet Edwin and Mater Wistan. It's also where readers see that Britons can live with Saxons. This is proved by Ivor. He is a Briton who is married to a Saxon woman. He is well respected. Most importantly, he is the voice of authority in the Saxon village.

This setting also highlights the fact that Axl and Beatrice are Christians. The Saxons in the village are pagans. It is the place where the two consider how God looks upon the land and they decide to go to the monastery for more answers.

The Monastery

It is at the Monastery where Axle and Beatrice find out that the she-dragon's breath causes the mist .The Monastery is also where Wistan and Father Jonus talk about religious issues.

The monks who live here are helping Querig survive by feeding her. The monks, however are split in their opinion of what should happen in the future. Some help Master Wistan, Edwin, Axl, and Beatrice. Other monks want those people dead since Master Wistan's mission is to kill the she-dragon.

Querig's Home

Everything comes to a head when they reach Querig's home. The forces that want to save her and the ones that want to see her dead fight. In the end, she's killed. With her death comes the lifting of the mist. This sets into motion a new era filled with memories and feelings of hatred and war.



Themes and Motifs

Historical Amnesia

People who study history, culture, and society may sometimes use the term "historical amnesia" in reference to a whole group of people who forget major events or trends. These happenings are usually negative. This is the affliction from which Axel, Beatrice, and those living in the surrounding land suffer.

When King Arthur found out that Britons had violated the truce Axel had negotiated, he did what he thought was best to preserve peace. He had Merlin enchant the breathe of the she-dragon so that everyone breathing it would forget the past. The memory loss doesn't just cover the land's violent history. It covers all memories. People can't remember what they were told to do minutes before. Parents can't remember that they have children. Beatrice and Axel decide to look for a son whom they vaguely remember. The girl with the goat wants to kill the dragon so that her parents remember that they have children.

People have forgotten, but they have not forgiven. On the surface this situation may seem to be the best solution. In fact, once people get their memories back Sir Wistan predicts that the peace will end as the Saxons take their revenge. This is not good, but neither is the long term effect of not having memories.

Memories create identities of people and groups. In fact, people need memories to know who they are and where they are going. This is what Beatrice realizes. How can she and Axel convince the boatman of their love for each other if they have no memories of their shared past? They can't move forward together without their memories.

Knowing that the return of memories means war between the Saxons and the Britons, the theme addresses the issue of which is more beneficial to society, historical amnesia or collective memory.

The Journey

On the surface, Axel and Beatrice are on a journey to find their son. In reality though, they are on a journey that will lead them from innocence to awareness.

Even though they aren't treated well in their warren, Axel and Beatrice live in innocence while they are there. They don't remember their past. They live only on the love they feel for each other. When they leave the norm of their daily life, they get firsthand knowledge of a world full of adventure and danger. They have to literally walk around a buried giant without disturbing him. They meet the boatman, and Beatrice realizes the possible consequences of the fact that she and Axel cannot remember their past. The couple, who innocently started a journey to find their son, also encounter sword fights and monsters. They even find themselves traveling with and caught between two



warriors with opposing goals. At first, the couple travels innocently with them, not realizing what is going on around them, but as the journey continues, their awareness increases. In the end they witness the battle that determines the future of the land.

Axl's and Beatrice's awareness of themselves also increases as they meet people who remember Axl in his role as King Arthur's negotiator. As their memory returns, so does their awareness of why their son had left and the problems the two had experienced in their marriage. They also become aware of the reason for the mist and face the question of whether the wish to restore memories is a case of "be careful for what you wish for because you may get it."

Readers also move from a state of innocence to awareness as the couple's journey continues. At the beginning of the novel, they believe that Axl is simply a soft spoken elderly man and Beatrice is his loyal wife. By the end, they know that Axl worked for King Arthur and that Beatrice hadn't always been loyal to Axl. In fact, it was her disloyalty that caused their son to run away. Readers also find out that the couple's son is dead and that the couple had fought about visiting his grave.

Along with Axl and Beatrice readers become aware of the reason for the mist and the opposing goals of Master Winston and Sir Gawain. In essence, Axl, Beatrice, and readers walk out of the mist together.

Love and Separation

The story of Axl and Beatrice has many elements of a classic medieval romance story. The story line includes the elements of the journey along with a mission and adventure. Axl and Beatrice undertake a journey or quest with the mission of finding their son. As the journey progresses, they face adventure. They also gain self-knowledge as their memories return, leading to self-transformation.

There's chivalry and honor, innocent children in the form of Edwin and Axl's and Beatrice's son who is so appalled by his mother's actions that he leaves home. The idealized setting, with ogres and dragons, also fits that of the medieval romance novel.

Even though it is set up as such, however, it veers off the path with an ending that's not the happy-ever-after conclusion such stories have. In fact this story ends with the prediction of a war torn land and the separation of the two love interests, Axl and Beatrice. Instead of their transformation bringing them together, it pulls them apart. In the process of reading their story, readers ponder whether or not love can really conquer all. Axl and Beatrice are elderly. They depend on and support each other. Yet, they are also humans and that means they are not perfect. They have done things to hurt and betray each other. Beatrice has had an affair. Axl worked under King Arthur and negotiated a truce that was broken. The possible consequences of the broken truce were so bad that King Arthur ordered the mist over the land. Once Axl and Beatrice discover the truth about their past, they move away from each other.



At the end of the novel, readers face the ultimate truth about couples who grow old together. Even if they have made it through trial and tribulations, at some point, they will have to separate because one will die before the other, leaving the surviving member of the pair the task of going on in life, alone.

When the time comes for Beatrice to cross to the island, she and Axl try to go together. However, in the end, she convinces him to let her go alone. This is ironic as she was the one who expressed concern about the two of them not being able to cross together. Now that she remembers her past, however, her feelings have changed. She knows that her son is dead, so she will not be alone on the island. Also, she no longer feels as close to Axl. Likewise, even though the boatman tells Axl that he'll be back for him, Axl does not seem to care. He keeps on walking without turning back. Perhaps, this is because the realization of what he did in the past gives him a reason to go on, now that the giant is awake. Or, perhaps, it is because he doesn't feel as close to Beatrice now that he knows how she betrayed him. He knows that she is at peace and that was his job. He feels that he will see her again when the time comes, but it is not now. Either way, this love story is a melancholy one.

Prejudice and Discrimination

One of the themes that this novel tackles combines prejudice and discrimination. What brings biased views about people or groups of people about? What is the outcome of such views, and does any of it make any sense?

In the novel, readers see three factors that can create prejudice and bias. One is ignorance and fear of the unknown. Another is the inability to accept differences or to deal with those who are different in the group in which they exist. A final one is simply being biased toward someone just because they are a member of a group that they've been taught to dislike.

Edwin is an example of someone becoming an outcast due to ignorance and fear of the unknown. At first people in the village care about him. They care enough, in fact, to risk their lives to rescue him. Once he returns, however, with a mysterious mark, they all disown him because he has the mark of the beast. Master Wistan says that an ogre hadn't given him the mark. The effects of their discrimination would have left Edwin without a home, if he hadn't been taken in by Master Winston. All of this had nothing to do with Edwin himself. He was a victim -- first being taken away by the ogre and then being shunned by his village.

It's interesting that Edwin, who has faced discrimination, may in the future hold feelings of bias and prejudice against someone just because they are a member of a group he was taught to discriminate against.

The people that Edwin may find himself discriminating against are the Britons. He even questions the reason behind hating all Britons as Axl and Beatrice have been so kind to him. Is he to hate them as well just because they are Britons? Yet, people have been



known to like someone until they find out what country they are from or what religion they practice. Like Edwin, readers find themselves asking whether this makes any sense.

The life Axl and Beatrice live in their warren suggests the another source of discrimination. Both of them are elderly. It's only natural that they will work slower than others in the warren. Yet, instead of helping them and appreciating them in other ways, the villagers force them to live in harsh conditions. They don't even allow Beatrice and Axl to have a candle, even though there is no evidence that they have ever knocked over a candle and started a fire. It seems as if just the thought that this might happen is enough to deprive them of this basic item. It's as if they are put out to pasture and are not allowed to share in the resources (like the fire) that the younger, more productive people have access to. It's ironic that this deprivation probably does make them slower, sicker, and less productive. Therefore, the villager's prejudice becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Two words go together when someone has suffered an injustice and that person is either trying to reconcile with the person who harmed them or find peace within themselves. These two words are "forgive" and "forget."

In an effort to spread peace across the land after the Britons betray the Saxons, King Arthur makes sure that the people in the land forget what happened. He doesn't, however, make sure that they forgive the wrongdoers. Thus, he has created peace on a shaky foundation because the people might not forgive. As soon as their memories are regained, the Saxons and the Britons will experience their mutual hatred for one another. Both groups must forgive to maintain the peace that the forgotten memories created.

When it comes to memories of the past, forgetting can be a mercy, but it can also be a burden. Axl and Beatrice carry the burden through much of their journey. Then, they leave the burden behind. As they move toward the duty to remember (represented by Master Wistan), they also realize that forgetting can be a mercy and sometimes events happen, such as the Briton's betrayal of the truce that create the urge to forget.



Styles

Point of View

The novel is written from two points of view which appear according to the story the author wants to tell. By switching between viewpoints, the author keeps the reader on their toes. When the author wants to focus on the story of Axl's and Beatrice's journey, he uses third person narration. The third person helps us get close to the main characters, Axl and Beatrice. There is no unreliable narrator here. The narrator wants us to know the truth just as much as Axl and Beatrice want to know the truth. Readers learn things as the characters do. Readers also feel as if they are sometimes victims of the mist themselves. As scenes come and go, one can sometimes get lost and not remember things. At least they may think that they have not remembered something, but it is because it is something the narrator has not yet shared. An example is when readers learn that Axl and Beatrice have a goat. Readers wonder what they missed. However, the goat had not been introduced in the story before this point.

The narrator shifts to first person in the First and Second Reverie of Sir Gawain. The author uses first person to show the ambiguous nature of the past. While the third person narrator is reliable, Gawain is looking for the truth. Is his version right? Do his actions sound like those of a coward? One can distort the past based on their perspective and motivations. Is he really trying to fight a truth that the readers already know? He isn't a reliable narrator, and the reader must make sense of it all and draw their own conclusions.

At the end of the novel, the boatman speaks. Through him, truth emerges. Beatrice is ready to make the last part of her journey alone. She and Axl may walk together on the island in the future, but that will come at a later time. Axl's time has not yet come.

At times, the point of view shifts to that of Edwin. He represents the future as readers get a glimpse of what life will be like in the future. Edwin wonders why he should hate Axl and Beatrice, who have been kind to him, just because they are Britons. However, when Axl raises his hand, Edwin sees it as an attack and runs to Master Wistan.

It's important to note the the third person point of view narrator speaks in a measured tone that never gets faster, even when there are sword fights, battles, and other action-packed adventures. It's as if the narrator reflects the spirit of Axl and Beatrice. They are old and tired. Beatrice is sick. They just want to survive and continue their search.

Language and Meaning

There are several points to note when looking at the language used in the novel. First and foremost, the narrator uses a measured syntax. In a novel in which events come and go, much like the memories that people may be able to grasp, readers appreciate this syntax as it helps them follow what is going on. The readers find it soothing and



calmly face acts of violence and bloodshed. Second, it fits the medieval time during which the novel takes place. None of the words confuse the meaning because they are ones that readers expect to see in this sort of novel. They echo the language of "the Lord of the Rings" and "the Hobbit."

It's interesting that even though the Saxons and Britons speak different languages, the author has them all speaking in a language that readers understand. There is no special vocabulary or slang. The language is accessible to all readers.

Structure

The structure of the novel weaves in stories taking readers through different parts of Axl's and Beatrice's journey. Readers might feel as if they are lost in the mist as they think they have missed things or don't remember certain events happening. This occurs when the narrator delays introducing an element in the story. The author will bring in the viewpoint of a different character or even shift the point of view from third person to first person from time to time. However, most of the plot is linear.

The mist appears in another way as well. When retelling the story what will people say? Some may remember some things while others may remember other things. The past is ambiguous and remembering what one read in this novel can be the same after only one reading.

As readers progress through the novel, the mist lifts slowly, as it does in the case of Axl and Beatrice. Finally, at the end of the novel, once the she-dragon is no longer alive, all becomes clear.



Quotes

Perhaps these were not their exact names or full names, but for ease, this is how we will refer to them.

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote represents several elements in the novel. The narrator doesn't really know, or remember, the names of the novel's protagonists. This is the same situation people in the land find themselves in when they can't remember. The narrator does give them a name because they are individuals, but their experience also represents everyone in the land and people in general. It also is interesting that the name the narrator gives them begin with the first two letters of the alphabet. This fact enhances the feeling that the names indeed are random.

You may wonder why Axl did not turn to his fellow villagers for assistance in recalling the past, but this was not as easy as you might suppose.

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 13)

Importance: This quote hints at the lost of memory from which the land suffers. Axl can't ask other people because they don't remember anything either.

It's queer the way the world's forgetting people and things from only yesterday and the day before that. Like a sickness come over us all.

-- Beatrice (chapter 1 paragraph 70)

Importance: This quote exposes what drives the events in the novel. It's the fact that no one has a memory of the past. They question at this point why this is the case. Later, the question turns to whether or not this is a good thing or is it better to let memories return and face the natural consequences.

Are you still there, Axl?

-- Beatrice (chapter 2 paragraph 9)

Importance: This quote works on several levels. On one level it represents the sentiments of marriage. Here's a partner asking the other whether he or she is still with them in the sense of are they still following the same path (as opposed to drifting apart). Axl says that he is. However, the fact that she always asks serves as an element of foreshadowing. Will Axl always be with her? On another level, her question represents a real concern for her husband's safety as the people at the end of a party are more likely to get attacked than those in the front.

A couple may claim to be bounded by love, but we boatmen may see instead resentment, anger, even hatred. Or great barrenness. Sometimes a fear of loneliness and nothing more.

-- The Boatman (chapter 2 paragraph 94)



Importance: The fact that Axl and Beatrice meet the boatman foreshadows that at some point, the two will have to pass his test if they are to stay together in the future. As the boatman represents the ferryman of the dead and Beatrice suffers from some unknown health problem, readers understand why she is anxious to have their memory reinstated. She wants to make sure that Axl comes with her. She feels that only way they can make sure that happens is to be able to remember their lives together. One wonders though if this is a case of "be careful what you wish for because you may get it." Once Axl and Beatrice remember their past will they still be so close? Are they close now because all they have is each other? This quote adds an element of suspense to the novel. Will Axl and Beatrice be able to cross the river together? How deep is their love in reality?

How will you and your husband prove your love for each other when you can't remember the past you shared?

-- Beatrice Quoting the Woman in the Dark Rags (chapter 2 paragraph 104)

Importance: This quote explains why Beatrice becomes almost more obsessed with finding out what causes the mist and destroying it than finding her son or how to heal her mysterious illness. She's worried that she and Axl will not be able to cross the river together because they can't remember the past.

The stranger thought it might be God himself had forgotten much from our pasts, events far distance, 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?

-- Ivor (chapter 3 paragraph 116)

Importance: Even though Beatrice and Axl interact with pagans, they are Christians. Therefore, when they try to figure out why the mist was put upon them, they consider the theory that man had done something so bad that even God wanted to forget it. This adds another element of mystery to the novel. What could man have done?

What on this earth could we have done to make God so ashamed?

-- Axl (chapter 3 paragraph 189)

Importance: Axl asks the question that readers also wonder at this point. It's ironic that he's the one who asks it because readers later find out that he was the negotiator who brokered the deal that his own people later violated. This made him ashamed, and he "chose" to forget his life as a negotiator for King Arthur. He led a simple life with Beatrice instead.

If that's how you've remembered it, Axl, let it be the way it was. With this mist upon us, any memory's a precious thing and we'd best hold tight to it.

-- Beatrice (chapter 3 paragraph 206)

Importance: This quote shows the importance of memories in defining one's life and one's self. Since they don't have any memories of the past, Beatrice strongly feels that they have to hold on as best they can to any memory that appears in the present.



Yet are you so certain, good mistress, you wish to be free of this mist? Is it not better some things remain hidden from our minds?

-- Father Jonus (chapter 6 paragraph 97)

Importance: In this quote, Father Jonus wants to know whether Beatrice will be happy once unhappy memories she may have return. She isn't because she feels that she and Axl love each other so deeply that their love can withstand unhappy memories -- just as lives do.

I said so before, Axl. Yet now it may even be we'll slay Querig with our own hands, there's a part of me fears the mist fading.

-- Beatrice (chapter 13 paragraph 45)

Importance: Beatrice voices a dilemma raised in the novel. Are the people in the land better off not remembering even though it means losing part of their identity and what will happen once memories come back, the bad along with the good? Will the people in the land be the same once their memories surface?

The giant, once well buried, now stirs. When soon he rises, as surely he will, the friendly bond between us will prove as knots young girls make with the stems of flowers.

-- Master Wistan (chapter 15 paragraph 219)

Importance: This quote foreshadows what will happen now that Querig has been killed and the people in the land have their memories back. He predicts that the outcome will not be good as the rather friendly bond that has existed between the Saxons and the Britons will easily break once the Saxons remember what the Britons did to them.