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COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN
KAZUO ISHIGURO'S NOVEL
*THE UNCONSOLED*¹

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Abstract: Kazuo Ishiguro's fourth novel *The Unconsoled* (1995) is structured as a surrealist *memoryscape* of its main protagonist and narrator Ryder. Supposedly a world-renowned pianist who finds himself in an unnamed Central European city, Ryder is meant to contribute to the cultural consolidation of the local community by performing at a forthcoming concert. While his labyrinthine memories gradually emerge and narratively map onto his environment as he attempts to understand his circumstances, the community's cultural and historical past surfaces as comparably intricate. In this paper, insights from contemporary memory studies and trauma theory are employed in the analysis of how collective memory is implicated in the construction of the community's narrative identity in *The Unconsoled* and how that identity is dependent on a configuration of cultural trauma. The analysis points to Ishiguro's subtly ironic treatment of the community's desire for metanarratives of presence, stability, value, and progress, perceived in the discrepancy between the city's idealistic mythologizing of its past and its reductionism of historical complexities to simple binaries. Conversely, when Ryder's individual mechanisms of self-preservation and trauma suppression are interpreted as comparable to the collective efforts at sustaining a coherent identity through collective memory, the novel's interpretation reveals how both individual and cultural identity are dependent on narrative configurations. Ultimately, these collective attempts at meaning-making are discerned as ambiguously complex, which precludes their strict ethical condemnation as ideological manipulation, since they emerge as intrinsic to the process of identity construction.

Keywords: collective memory, memory studies, trauma, archive, canon, narrative identity

1. Introduction

In his fourth novel *The Unconsoled* (1995), the British author of Japanese origin and winner of the 2017 Nobel Prize in Literature, Kazuo Ishiguro, radically unsettles the geographic and historical coordinates of the conventional setting. He does so by immersing the novel's main protagonist Ryder in a surrealist world of an unnamed city, in what is probably Central Europe some time after the Cold War had subsided, although such contextualization ought to remain tentative. Even though Ishiguro's first three novels are commonly subsumed under the genre of realism (see

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Holmes 2005: 11–22), they configure only a semblance of realism and historical specificity, whereas in fact they are set either in imagined locales (Ishiguro's memories of Nagasaki in *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World*) or mythologized landscapes (the nostalgic vision of country-house England in *The Remains of the Day*) (see Shaffer, Wong 2008: 45–46). Consequently, *The Unconsoled* does not constitute such an immense leap into abstraction as many have speculated (see Beedham 2010: 102–105). It does, however, through an abstracted setting, emphasize the universal aspects of the mechanisms of memory, both individual and collective, which will be explored in this paper.

At the beginning of the novel, Ryder already finds himself in the unknown city and is revealed as suffering from a vague form of memory loss, incapable of clearly recalling why he is there or what he is supposed to be doing. He is subsequently portrayed by the townspeople as a world-renowned pianist on tour, whose arrival is part of the city's extensive preparations for the Thursday night concert showcasing the performance of a previously defamed conductor Leo Brodsky, who is to initiate the city's cultural rejuvenation and replace its discarded cellist icon, Henri Christoff. Ryder's role in the cultural consolidation of the city's collective identity – which is rooted in musical excellence and worth, but is likewise in danger of being reduced to a “cold modern city” (Ishiguro 2013: 107) due to an undefined crisis – lies in providing support to the community, as well as in performing a recital and giving a speech at the concert. Ryder's struggles to navigate between personal hardship and trauma on the one hand, and professional demands on the other, conform to the logic of an anxiety dream, which structures the novel and overlaps with the community's own identity-shaping insecurities. Such a logic allows an interpretation of the three days Ryder spends in the city before his departure for Helsinki, as a narrative mapping of his emerging memories onto his environment. In other words, the world of the novel is interpreted as Ryder's personal landscape of memory – *a memoryscape*.

What the following interpretation aims to demonstrate is how both individual and collective identities in *The Unconsoled* are based on narrative configurations, by making a connection between Ryder's struggles with his memories and the community's issues with their own problematic past, which haunts their attempts at constituting a homogenous identity. The interpretation likewise aims to show how collective memory is grounded in ideology, how it mediates between the spectrality of archival history and the canonical narrative crucial for identity preservation and maintenance, and how such ambiguous and complex efforts at meaning-making preclude their straightforward ethical condemnation as ideological manipulation.

2. Collective Memory: Between the Spectral Archive and the Constructed Canon

In his study *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Andreas Huyssen points to a “shift in the experience and sensibility of time” which has since the 1980s rerouted Western societies’ political and cultural focus from “present futures” to “present pasts” (2003: 11). Toward the end of the Cold War tensions, and by gaining a better vantage point to take stock of the cultural ramifications of World War II, the preferred future-oriented gaze of the modernist period was supplanted by an almost obsession-like focus on the past and, by implication, on memory. The past has a spectral presence for the late twentieth-century cultural consciousness, which no longer views time in “the shape of an arrow that runs irreversibly from the past into the future” that was during the period of modernity “considered to be natural and neutral, an abstract entity and objective realm independent of cultural constructions and inaccessible to human manipulation” (Assmann 2013: 42). The positivism of the decade immediately following World War II mirrored the positivism of the late nineteenth century and was likewise subsequently rejected. However, the notions of private time and subjective memory, which were crucial for contradicting historical linearity in modernist literature of the early twentieth century, were now expanded to include issues regarding collective memory, often in the context of social constructivism.

Maurice Halbwachs is frequently considered to be the founder of a separate discipline of memory studies in his conceptualization of *collective memory*, but as Olick et al. point out, “his ideas did not emerge from a vacuum” (2011: 11). Collective identity in the twentieth century would become problematic and a relevant split would be perceived between collective memory and history, or as Pierre Nora phrased it: “There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory” (1989: 7). Conversely, collective memory ought not to be considered as stable or coherent, since the group formations to which the said memory is ascribed cannot be defined as such (see Huyssen 2003: 17). Therefore, Halbwachs’ notion of collective memory is complicated by constructivism and poststructuralism.

Huyssen highlights that “the epistemological discourse of constructivism” (2003: 4) has shaken traditional historiography in its core, especially regarding its supposed objectivity and opposition to memory as unreliable and subjective. He notes the well-known cultural, philosophical, and political arguments against history in its canonical form – “the post-Nietzschean attacks on linearity, on causality, and on the myths of origin or telos as articulated in the work of Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida; the postcolonial critique of Western history as fundamentally implicated in an imperialist and racist Western modernity” (2003: 5) – but he also emphasizes that such delegitimization does not take away the power

from the archive. Quite to the contrary, it affords the archive a relevance in the contemporary cultural focus on memory, in that “the seduction of the archive and its trove of stories of human achievement and suffering has never been greater” (Huysen 2003: 5). We might have dethroned history as History, as an all-knowing *magistra vitae*, but we have not severed ties with the past in the manner of modernist aspirations to “make it new” and of *creatio ex nihilo*. In other words, history may have lost its claim to an objective, universal narrative of the past, but in its interaction with the discourses of memory, it has perhaps never been more relevant for the contemporary, globalized cultural consciousness.

Aleida Assmann has written on the archive and its relevance for contemporary memory studies (see Olick et al. 2011: 334–337). She has made a connection between the selectiveness of individual memory and the dynamics of forgetting, which is constitutional for collective memory. While active forgetting implies censorship of different kinds, passive forgetting does not entail the obliteration of the preserved traces of memories, but their falling out of “the frames of attention, valuation, and use” (Olick et al. 2011: 334). Remembering on a collective scale can likewise be defined through the same dichotomy. Assmann refers to “the actively circulated memory that keeps the past present as the *canon* and the passively stored memory that preserves the past past as the *archive*” (Olick et al. 2011: 335). The archive is always situated in between the canon and forgetting, which is why its material is in a state of latency (see Olick et al. 2011: 336). And latency is what constitutes the inherently problematic nature of the archive, which is the central argument of Jacques Derrida’s *The Archive Fever*, further pointing to how our obsession with the archive reveals a desire for the totality of presence.

Derrida traces the etymology of the word *archive* to the Greek *arkhē*, which refers to both the commencement and the commandment². The archive, as a prosthetic site of memory, is imagined as a place of origin which enables the continuation and preservation of all traces of data, as well as a place of truth which affords the authority for stating the law. However, according to Derrida, it is a fallacy that archives can confirm presence based on a posited inherent validity. The death drive, which works covertly to destroy presence, and which enables repression into the unconscious, threatens the archive with destruction from the start and is what produces *archive fever* (see Derrida 1998: 12). If the totality of memory existed, if we were realized as pure presence, there would be no need for archives. The archive “will never be either memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience. On the contrary: the archive

2 “This name [*arkhē*] apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, *there* where things *commence* – physical, historical, or ontological principle – but also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods *command*, *there* where authority, social order are exercised, *in this place* from which *order* is given – nomological principle” (Derrida 1998: 1).

takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory” (Derrida 1998: 11). The desire for the archive arises out of the need to confirm our origin and our authority, to confirm our absolute presence. However, as forgetting is already inscribed into remembering, so a subversive, eroding trace conditions every archival record which is monumentalized and canonized. Therefore, “the structure of the archive is *spectral*. It is spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent ‘in the flesh,’ neither visible nor invisible, a trace” (Derrida 1998: 84). As such, it is tied “to a very singular experience of the promise” (Derrida 1998: 36) that it can produce both an ontological consolation and the irrefutable truth. However, both are only spectres which haunt all attempts at constituting our identities as totalities.

3. The “Double Wound” of Traumatic Memory

Aside from its relation to a paradigmatic shift with respect to temporality, the “memory boom” of the late twentieth century is inherently bound with a fixation on the traumatic. “Together with memory, trauma is a concept that has (re-)entered Western consciousness since the 1980s and deeply changed its insights, values and sensibility” (Assmann 2013: 53). The surge in memory studies relates to a deficiency of the identity paradigm, stemming from the work of Sigmund Freud, which was further expanded by Jacques Lacan and his poststructuralist return to Freud’s oeuvre. The unconscious, which can be linked to the archive on a collective level, is in Freud’s metapsychology the *locus* of repressed memories. Derrida also notes, in reference to Freud, that “repression is an archivization” (1998: 64). And the repressed content *par excellence* is the traumatic, or as Michael Roth underlines:

... the extreme event itself resists representation; it seems to defy the meaning-making activity at the core of both the psychoanalytic and historical enterprise. The traumatic cannot be contained in representation, but it is “too big to fail” – too important to be left out of an attempt to make sense of the past at either the individual or collective level. (2012: xviii)

Trauma is what cannot be made to fit into the organized structure of one’s perceived identity, but as repressed it returns repeatedly to haunt the traumatized. In its affect-ridden spectrality, it manifestly exemplifies the fraught nature of all memory: “[T]rauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (Caruth 1996: 4).

Cathy Caruth, one of the founders of trauma studies in the humanities, has emphasized this spectral aspect of trauma by drawing on Freud’s theories of repression, belatedness, and repetition compulsion. Her focus is on trauma as unassimilable, as unavailable to consciousness

until it returns to plague the survivor. In that sense, trauma acts as a “double wound” (see Caruth 1996: 1–9), since wounding instigates the cycle of repetitive post-traumatic distress on account of trauma’s dual nature. It threatens one’s identity structure too intensely, thus precluding meaningful perception, but then it belatedly returns and compulsively repeats itself in symbolic form, thereby revealing the constructed nature of one’s identity structure³. “If a trauma is unforgettable, this is, paradoxically, because it cannot be remembered, cannot be recounted” (Roth 2012: 83). Therefore, the traumatic cannot simply be delegated to the past as past, although it cannot explicitly be pulled into the present, either. As Roth succinctly noted, trauma acts as “a charismatic wound” (2012: xviii) – it hurts one’s sense of stability and haunts attempts at regaining that stability, since it points to there being something amiss with the construction of that stability in the first place, which makes it a wound one cannot help but “pick at”.

Conversely, while discussing national trauma and collective memory, Arthur Neal highlights that “[r]estoring a sense of order and coherence becomes a necessary societal response to conditions of trauma” (1998: 22). This is in line with both Freud’s privileging of the work of mourning over melancholic refusal to let go of the past and Dominick LaCapra’s warning against the conflation of structural and historical trauma (1999: 699–702). However, while we ought not to disregard historical trauma’s contextual relevance to specific individuals, groups, and locales, its ties with the structure of symbolic paradigms, in which those individuals, groups, and locales are enmeshed, must not be downplayed. As Neal emphasizes: “[C]ollective memories may be understood as forms of myth-making” (1998: 215). To confront trauma and regain a sense of continuity and coherence of identity means also to participate in procedures of symbolic reconfiguration and of narrative resignification, which have the power to shape new structures of meaning.

4. The Narrative *Memoryscape* of *The Unconsoled*

The following overview of how individual memory is mapped onto the setting of Ishiguro’s novel *The Unconsoled* is significant with respect to how Ryder’s behaviour, as the main protagonist and first-person narrator of the novel, sheds light on the mechanisms which the community of the unnamed city employs regarding collective memory and identity construction. Throughout the novel and often unconsciously, Ryder ma-

3 In his text “Tuché and automaton”, Lacan wrote the following: “The function of the *tuché*, of the real as encounter – the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter – first presented itself in the history of psycho-analysis in a form that was in itself already enough to arouse our attention, that of the trauma” (1978: 55). Trauma, for Lacan, is a missed encounter with the Real, an oblique glimpse at the Thing itself, which cannot be symbolized or thought, and which destabilizes any and all claims of the Symbolic over straightforward representation, universal meaning, or a unified identity.

nipulates traces of his elusive memory in order to situate himself more firmly in his unknown surroundings, which constitute his *memoryscape*. He projects his fears and fantasies onto other characters in the novel, some of whom function as his alter-egos: Boris resembles Ryder as a boy, troubled by the failing marriage of his parents; Stephan points to Ryder's professional inadequacies and doubts before he sets off to become a world-renowned pianist; and Brodsky is a future vision of Ryder if he renounced human bonds and familial relationships, and immersed himself in a trauma-induced melancholy (see Lewis 2000: 111–120). Ishiguro himself has said that: "Our view of other people is often shaped by our need to work certain things out about ourselves. We tend to appropriate other people – more than we perhaps care to admit" (Shaffer, Wong 2008: 114). Along with this appropriation of other characters for the purpose of weaving a narrative about himself, other aspects of the fictional world of *The Unconsoled*, such as time-space distortions, absurdity, and uncanny contingency, point to a specific dream logic which guides Ryder's narrative (see Drag 2014: 107–109). Within that dream-like world⁴, Ryder's perceptions, actions, and relationships form a unique *memoryscape*, which functions as a metaphor for the mechanisms of memory as they are employed toward identity construction and preservation. These mechanisms recur and reconfigure Ryder's memory traces while he negotiates between the diachrony of his narrative identity and the synchrony of his *memoryscape*.

However, those negotiations are plagued by a complex relation to alterity, which limits Ryder's control over his *memoryscape*. The wish-fulfilment is in his world complicated by anxiety and trauma. The unnamed city he finds himself in is surreally labyrinthine (see Baxter 2011) and populated by characters from his past, who appear unexpectedly and confront him with his unresolved past commitments⁵. Ryder's at times strange omniscience, when he abruptly has access to other characters' thoughts, memories, and behaviours, which he himself does not physically witness, is motivated by a creative approach to his environment (see Lewis 2000: 104; Reitano 2007: 361), but he does not have the ability to control those around him. He is not an all-powerful character; he is simply mapping his memories onto his environment. And those memories are an amalgam of retroactively combined memory traces, current

4 Fairbanks underlines that "Ryder is not living in anyone's dream but in a dreamworld, one that has no ulterior reality behind it" (2013: 605). This is relevant because the fictional world of *The Unconsoled* should not be interpreted as someone's dream, but as a setting which operates according to dream logic. Ryder cannot wake up from the world of *The Unconsoled* just as we cannot wake up from a state of being already awake.

5 On the local trams he rides to unknown locations, on the winding streets of the city, and in the homes which uncannily resemble those of his past memories, Ryder meets his childhood and school friends, such as Fiona Roberts, Geoffrey Saunders, and Jonathan Parkhurst. Through conversations he has with them, the reader becomes aware of traces from Ryder's past, which are usually in conflict with the current image he projects about himself.

perceptions, and projected fantasies. Ryder's omniscience stands for the inscription of the alterity of the other within oneself, and in that process the absorbing of their alterity. The other's thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and memories become inextricably entangled with Ryder's own meaning-making activities when they are focalized through his perspective.

On the one hand, the malleability of Ryder's views of other characters, his purpose in the city, and his own identity, point to their constructed nature and dependence on the demands of synchronic coherence. On the other, however, the solidified memories he uses as reference markers for the diachronic continuity of his identity, are perhaps even more relevant since they repeatedly return to his childhood and to his parents' fraught relationship as the traumatic kernel of his identity struggles. This trauma is overtly afforded very limited narrative space, and even when Ryder does recollect the earliest period of his life through analepsis, he can only elusively hint at the cause of his suffering (see Ishiguro 2013: 16–17, 171–173, 214, 261–265, 357). This can be interpreted as both the belatedness of the traumatic and its unassimilable nature into the normalized identity structure. The traumatic is, in addition, manifested in the novel's convoluted spatial and temporal compressions and extensions, which take Ryder on long, winding journeys of self-exploration, only to lead him immediately back to the city centre where he is required to face the present moment and abandon remembrances. Irony permeates numerous scenes of the novel, when with a symptomatic belatedness, Ryder becomes aware of his emotions only upon experiencing them physically. Once Sophie and Boris, his putative wife and (step)son, ultimately leave him at the end of the novel, Ryder comments: "I became aware of him [the electrician] leaning forward, patting my shoulder, and I realised I was sobbing" (Ishiguro 2013: 532). Ryder is not at home with himself, which is signalled by his *memoryscape* not facilitating wish-fulfilment but anxiety, making him incapable of generating a sustainable identity narrative.

The Unconsoled, perhaps unsurprisingly, ends in an anti-climax, since Ryder does not even perform at the concert, while throughout the novel he had been grappling with severe anxiety precisely on account of that performance, to which he had sacrificed his most valuable relationships. Absorbed in his idealism, Ryder demonstrates little critical awareness of how he constructs his identity via the processes of memory, and the consoling narratives he opts for – being a famous pianist, the saviour of communities, and a loved son – ring hollow as the fulfilment of his desires. Since the unnamed city can be interpreted as a metaphor for Ryder's memory processes, the parallels between individual and collective memory are effectively realized in *The Unconsoled* and will be explored in the next section.

5. The Mediation of Cultural Trauma Through Collective Memory in *The Unconsoled*

Although the setting of *The Unconsoled* remains unspecified throughout the novel, the Germanic names of the city's monuments, streets, and its residents, along with the suggestion that the country had recently been caught up in an ideological conflict, which is still culturally problematic, point to Central European coordinates and a late-twentieth-century framework⁶. However, Ishiguro himself has stated the following:

It was very late in the day that I decided to use Germanic names. In a way I could change them all to Scandinavian names, or even French names. You know, I'd have to change a few details, the style of certain houses or whatever, but you could almost set that thing down anywhere. It was by and large a *landscape of imagination*. (Shaffer, Wong 2008: 131; my emphasis)

While the unnamed city of the novel is interpreted as Ryder's *memoryscape*, on account of which its geographical and historical determinants are to a certain degree interchangeable, the crisis which unsettles the community is very much a modern crisis. Although the "unnamed urban setting of *The Unconsoled* is not one city but a palimpsest of soft and malleable European cities that resist geographical fixity" (Baxter 2011: 135), it nevertheless remains an urban setting, whose characteristics point to an abstracted post-Cold-War, Central-European framework, one that "suggests a particular national scene, permeated by a sense of a fall from history and of an eroded national identity and diminished cultural autonomy" (Reitano 2007: 363)⁷.

The community undergoing an unnamed crisis in *The Unconsoled* is, similarly to Ryder, experiencing disorganization, chaos, and a lack of stability, belonging, and a sense of worth. In his study *Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*, Kirby Farrell points to

a mood of cultural crisis: a sense that something has gone terribly wrong in the modern world, something that we can neither assimilate nor put right. The mood's special poignancy comes not only from life's usual struggles and sorrows, but also from a sense that *the ground of experience has been compromised*. (1998: ix-x; my emphasis)

A crisis of this kind pervasively saturates the atmosphere of the unnamed city in *The Unconsoled*. It unsettles their collective memory and

6 Only two years are referenced in the novel when Ryder remarks: "I remembered that the Charlton brothers had played for England in the 1966 final, the van der Kerkhof brothers for Holland in 1978" (Ishiguro 2003: 162).

7 Robinson also points out that the "lack of history [in *The Unconsoled*] is itself a marker of Central Europe. [...] Individual guilt, displacement, forgetting – this is primary 'landscape of feeling' which Ishiguro consistently aims for. But the novel is only superficially ahistorical. Central European history is a latent content which we can profitably ascribe to the dreamwork of the narrative" (2006: 117–118).

has undeniable affinities with the traumatic, which is unassimilable and not easily expunged. Karl Pedersen, an esteemed older member of the Citizens' Mutual Support Group, describes the crisis to Ryder in a reticent manner typical for the novel's characters: "Each of us could recount dozens of sad cases. Of lives blighted by loneliness. Of families despairing of ever rediscovering the happiness they'd once taken for granted" (Ishiguro 2013: 113). The roots of this crisis remain undisclosed for the duration of the novel and given that the city operates as Ryder's *memoryscape*, which is troubled by inexpressible trauma, a relevant parallel to how the community deals with its own traumas emerges, pointing to their being not only undisclosed within the collective memory paradigm, but undisclosable. As the traumatic kernel of the community's collective unconscious, the crisis haunts it from within.

Another aspect of the collective scene left unexplained in the novel concerns music as the essential paradigm of the community's collective identity. We can surmise, based on Ishiguro's general interest in using different artistic or professional structures as symbolic playgrounds for building cultural networks in his novels⁸, that a similar literary technique is employed in *The Unconsoled*. However, since the setting is abstracted and made to conform to the logic of dreams, music in *The Unconsoled* likewise gains a more abstract quality and assumes a role not unlike that of politics. Just as the contemporary world has become structurally intricate, so music in *The Unconsoled* feels complex and distant to the townspeople⁹. Christoff tries to explain the situation to Ryder:

To be perfectly fair, it's not their fault. The modern forms, they're so complex now. Kazan, Mullery, Yoshimoto. Even for a trained musician such as myself, it's hard now, very hard. The likes of von Winterstein, the Countess, what chance do they have? They're completely out of their depth. To them it's just crashing noise, a whirl of strange rhythms. Perhaps they've convinced themselves over the years they can hear something there, certain emotions, meanings. But the truth is, they've found nothing at all. They're out of their depth, they'll never understand how modern music works. Once it was simply Mozart, Bach, Tchaikovsky. Even the man in the street could make a reasoned guess about that sort of music. But the modern forms! How can people like this, untrained, provincial people, how can they ever understand such things, however great a sense of duty they feel towards the community? (Ishiguro 2013: 185–186)

It is evident from the quoted passage that the culturally cohesive role of music is of vast importance for the townspeople in *The Unconsoled*, to the point of becoming an obstacle for establishing a collective identity.

⁸ Examples include painting in *An Artist of the Floating World*, butlership in *The Remains of the Day*, the detective profession in *When We Were Orphans*, and the liberal arts in *Never Let Me Go*.

⁹ Horton determines the specific context of *The Unconsoled* as one resembling "the homogenising and claustrophobic present of global late capitalism" (2014: 193).

The community would like to view their cultural identity as grounded in an ideology of musical excellence and worth, from which they expect stability, continuity, and coherence. However, since the demands placed on the individual are too high with respect to understanding the complexities of the operative superstructure, the townspeople resort to projecting onto their musical representatives both the notions of origin and authority, thereby affording them with the aura characteristic of a personality cult. Having discarded Christoff, the cellist, as the previously idealized musical icon, after his traditional approach to music with his “blue folder [of] facts” (Ishiguro 2013: 195) becomes unsustainable, the community turns to filling the vacancy by reviving Brodsky, a local drunkard and misanthrope, who used to be a prominent conductor. Both are, however, only scapegoats of the community’s unwillingness to face up to the intricacies of the complex cultural circumstances and the discrepancies of their collective memory. Christoff is even in name an indicated scapegoat, since he assumes the role of Christ who is subsequently cast off. He acts as a pre-empted container, cheated out of his humanity, for the townspeople to project their insecurities onto and sacrifice him for their own sins. Whereas Christoff needs to be buried in the archive, Brodsky is to be resurrected from it as one who will not “stifle natural emotion” (Ishiguro 2013: 190) but release it through his romantic approach to music. However, he also fails as a potential saviour of the collective imaginary consciousness when his performance at the concert goes horribly wrong. When the community immediately renounces him, they prove to be guided by simplified binaries in the configuration of their collective identity, which then requires scapegoating of those inscribed with the Derridean *trace*, which unsettles those binaries as operative¹⁰.

Both Christoff and Brodsky are figures who in favourable climates become canonized by the city authorities through a collective inscription of value. Once they are deemed insufficiently worthy, they are discarded into the archive, with a collective desire to cast them into oblivion. But the spectrality of the archive that the community tries to suppress, comes back to haunt them, which is most palpable through the ambiguous effect that an elusive figure by the name of Max Sattler has on their historical consciousness. Max Sattler’s name points to a unique amalgam of references to Karl Marx, Joseph Stalin, and Adolph Hitler, although in the novel he is a figure from a century prior to the narrative present. Never-

10 Derrida (see 1978: 289) explains how every binary opposition operates according to a more complex logic than that of a simple difference. It is functional because it is based on a never-ending process of *différance*, a deferral of difference, which inscribes a *trace* (an empty signifier, a lack) within every asserted meaning. Deconstruction aims at unsettling binaries to the point of making the trace palpable, even though it can do so only through other binaries. As a method of critique, deconstruction can only temporarily disassemble the binaries, but they remain operative. What the community in *The Unconsoled* does not do is deconstruct their own meaning-making procedures, which is why they project the inassimilable traces of their signifying processes onto their scapegoats and force them to carry the aporias of their collective identity paradigms.

theless, he bears connotations of a divisive, inherently complex legacy, which points in the direction of the most extreme political metanarratives of the twentieth century. Pedersen explains to Ryder that “Sattler has gained a place in the *imaginings* of citizens here. His role, if you like, has become mythical. Sometimes he’s feared, sometimes he’s abhorred. And at other times, his memory is worshipped” (Ishiguro 2013: 374). It is not Sattler *per se* who comes back to haunt the collective memory of the community, but their specific circumstances of a lingering crisis do generate a hiatus to be filled and it is the ex-centricity of a figure like Sattler which has the most powerful appeal. However, it is likewise true that “it’s simply not in this city’s nature to embrace the extremes of Sattler. He holds an attraction for certain people *precisely because* he’s so distant, a piece of local myth” (Ishiguro 2013: 375). To truly engage with a figure like Sattler would be to make drastic changes to one’s identity configurations because the community would need to confront his legacy and determine how it relates to their current belief and value paradigms. But this difficult work of historical excavation into the current configurations of collective memory is renounced when the townspeople decide to cling to their recognizable, consoling identity narratives. Although those narratives may ring hollow, they are comforting in a time of harrowing crisis.

After Brodsky’s eccentric debacle at the concert, which the community phrases in terms of value as “border[ing] on the immoral” (Ishiguro 2013: 502), the city’s mayor Mr von Winterstein prolongs the *status quo* by holding a speech which has a calming effect on the townspeople by confirming their idealistic conception of their collective identity. One of the breakfast banquet waiters describes the aftermath of the concert:

Mr von Winterstein gave a fine speech in the foyer just now all about the splendid heritage of this city, all the things we’ve got to be proud of. He mentioned a lot of our achievements down the years, pointed out all the awful problems other cities are blighted with we here never have to worry about. [...] It made us all feel good about ourselves and our city and now everyone’s enjoying themselves. (Ishiguro 2013: 516)

The mayor’s speech functions as a consoling narrative, the power of which lies in the simplistic appeals of a mythical and nostalgic view of the past, easily digested through affective symbolization. The townspeople accept the consolation, just as Ryder is eventually comforted by an obviously fabricated story of his parents’ pleasant stay in the city and an enjoyable breakfast on the local circular tramline. However, it is through irony, which arises in the clash between the idealistic stipulations of grandeur and the simplistic mechanisms of self-preservation, that Ishiguro’s novel points to an aporia permeating all meaning-making paradigms. And in *The Unconsoled* that aporia demands deconstruction because it takes sacrifices in the form of scapegoated victims, such as Christoff and Brodsky, but also Sophie and Boris, whom Ryder sacrifices for the sake of maintaining his own idealistic notions of dignity.

6. Conclusion

Ishiguro's novel *The Unconsoled* portrays an inherent interconnect- edness between the mechanisms of individual and collective memory. Traumatic "double wounds" condition both Ryder's appropriations of the others' alterity and his evasion of confronting his past, as well as the community's tendencies to sacrifice those they inscribe with their mis- conceived ideologies and refusals to accept responsibility for the crisis af- flicting their sense of stability and value. Self-delusion is one of the major themes of Ishiguro's oeuvre, and it has, along with memory, remained a source of his prolonged interest. What he manages to disclose within his reticent, understated, subtly ironic prose, prone to structural allegory, is that the narrative configurations we employ to tell stories *about* ourselves *to* ourselves are never straightforward and far from easily decipherable. We are not granted an impartial metadiscourse with which to divest our narrative identities of their affective power, which is especially discon- certing within a postmodern framework of constructivism, interdepend- ence of language and perception, and a lack of an overarching authority capable of providing continuity and coherence to a sense of self.

Both Ryder and the wider community of the city are ultimately left unconsoled. What is missing is the totality of a comforting metanarra- tive, a consoling metaphysics of presence, and an archive which would guarantee origin and authority. Although they simulate them, neither of these is truly available to the unnamed city's community that stands for contemporary European nationhood, reduced to a split between the abstract structures that govern and the individuals who, like Ryder, are representative of postmodern subjectivity, anxious and displaced, unable to make peace with themselves. On the other hand, what *The Unconsoled* also reveals is a structure of feeling which dares to privilege the individu- al within the existing chaos. Regardless of how oppressive the superstruc- ture or how constricting the pull of history and ideology is in Ishiguro's prose, he nevertheless manages to portray the emotion which permeates individual struggles for meaning and purpose. The collective is in *The Unconsoled* inherently conditioned by the individual and, as such, cannot be reduced to a manipulating ideology one can easily denounce, since both individual and collective identities are based on narrative config- urations. However, through an emphasis on scapegoat victimhood, the appropriation of the other's alterity, and self-delusion regarding our own meaning-making stories, *The Unconsoled* likewise calls for a complex de- construction of both individual and collective memory. Otherwise, an uncritical acceptance of constructed narratives as *a priori* given or inher- ently authoritative and originating, hinders a contextualized reconfigu- ration of the past, whose suppression or nostalgic idealization have the power not only to undermine, but to completely inhibit one's attempts at making sense of oneself and the community one belongs to.

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Колективно сећање у роману Без утехе Казуа Ишигура

Резиме

Без утехе (1995), четврти роман Казуа Ишигура, британског писца јапанског порекла и добитника Нобелове награде за књижевност 2017. године, нарративно је уобличен као надреални *меморијски њејзаж* главног протагонисте и приповедача Рајдера. Као реномираном пијанисти светског угледа, Рајдеру је поверен задатак да путем рецитала на предстојећем концерту помогне заједници мештана неименованог централноевропског града у коме се обрео, да се консолидује путем културно-естетске еманципације. Упоредо са навирањем Рајдерових сећања која се нарративно мапирају на његово окружење у виду лавиринтске структуре анксиозног сна, културна и историјска прошлост града такође се манифестује као неасимилована и спектрална. Анализа романа укључује увиде савремених студија сећања и теорије трауме ради разлучења аспеката колективног сећања у роману као релевантних за конституисање нарративног идентитета заједнице, који се испоставља као условљен конфигурацијама културне трауме. Позивамо се на аналитичке концепте архиве и канона, као значајне за конституисање постулираних идентитета, поред трауме као „двоструке ране“ која подразумева компулсивно навраћање прошлости у периодима кризе или транзиције наводно стабилних идентитетских концепција. Анализа романа указује на Ишигурову суптилно-ироничну представу колективних тенденција ка метанаративима присуства, стабилности, вредности и прогреса, која је остварена у раскораку између идеалистичког митологизовања прошлости, коме су мештани града склони, и њиховог свођења историјске сложености на упрошћене бинарности. Са друге стране, однос зависности између Рајдерових личних механизма самоочувања путем потискивања трауме и стремљења заједнице ка одржању кохерентног идентитета путем хомогенизовања колективног сећања, упућује на нарративне конфигурације као потку и структурну матрицу индивидуалног и културног идентитета. Покушаји њиховог осмишљавања испостављају се као амбивалентни и комплексни, што не дозвољава њихову недвосмислену осуду у етичком погледу као идеолошких манипулација, будући да чине саставни део сваког конципирања иденти-