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Research Paper

"TRAUMA AND LITERARY HEALING: STORIES OF SURVIVAL AND RENEWAL"

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Abstract: The theme of trauma has become the main issue of modern-day literary conversations, which indicates the psychological, social, and cultural disruptions people and communities have gone through. Literature is not only a trauma, but it is a place of healing, reconstruction and renewal. The paper explores the role of literary narratives as transformational places where the narrators owe all their pain to, rearranging it in meaning-making and reconstructing their identities. Based on the trauma theory and narrative psychology, the paper addresses the idea that survivors survive through narrative as a way of symbolically recovering and transforming into individuals. The discussion demonstrates the silenced nature of literature, its ability to provide a voice to silenced experiences, social remembrance, and creates resilience. Through the analysis of the narratives describing personal and communal trauma, this paper will claim that literary storytelling can be both a witness and a solution, changing the meaning of suffering and its disillusionment into wholeness.

Keywords: Trauma, Literary Healing, Survival Narratives, Memory, Identity Reconstruction, Narrative Therapy, Resilience, Renewal, Cultural Trauma

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Introduction:

The twenty and the twenty-one centuries has seen the history of violence, displacement, social instability, and fragmentation of the minds as never before. War, migration, gender-based violence, environmental disasters and systemic oppression have caused unending wounds to people and communities. In this associated aspect, literature has become a strong platform of expression of trauma and negotiation of its outcome. Trauma as an overpowering and interfering experience that erases memory, identity, and stable emotionless, is usually difficult to direct in representing. But literature allows the place of expression of the unspeakable.

The role of narrative is important in this process. The psychological studies have provided indications that storytelling helps an individual to sort the unstructured memories into meaningful patterns. Literary texts reform fragmented experiences with the help of plot, metaphor, voice, and perspective and offer

interpretation guidelines on surviving. The storytelling of trauma is not a descriptive act per se but rather a building act. Literature makes a silence speak and pain testify.

Victim to agency There are survival narratives in which characters transform into victims and agents. These stories do not eliminate suffering but tend to accept it as being a part of a process of regeneration. The healing must never be a straight and unbroken process in literatures but it develops as memory activity, introspection, community affiliation, and resistance. Therefore, literature will be both a testifier of trauma and a source of resilience.

This paper uncovers the uses of trauma narratives as a source of literary healing with references to theoretical elements and narrative techniques that help one survive and be reborn.

Related works:

Trauma studies have been an interdisciplinary field of study that has been developed in terms of sociological, psychological, feminist, and

literary views. One of the initial contributions is that of Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004), in whom he theorizes about cultural trauma. Alexander claims that trauma is not merely a product of a disastrous situation but a social mediation in whose framework communities apprehend and create the corporate agony. The cultural trauma occurs when representatives of a group feel that they had been exposed to the horrendous situation that creates a lasting imprint in their group consciousness. This view transforms trauma as a personal psychological situation to a cultural discourse that is framed through representation, memory and social discourse.

Elaborating on the trauma theory and its conceptual application to literary criticism, Michelle Balaev (2008) criticizes some of the earlier conceptions which focused on the universal fragmentation of psyche. The model advanced by Balaev presupposes pluralism where the social, cultural, and political contexts of the traumatic experience are taken into account. It suggests that literary trauma cannot be narrowed to Freudian repetition and belatedness but rather perceived in the spatial, historical, and identity-based realms. This strategy expands literariness trauma theory to other Eurocentric paradigms of psychology.

In a similar fashion, Dominick LaCapra (2001) distinctly draws the lines between absent and loss with subtle ethical overtones of how even the expression of trauma is represented. LaCapra presents the notions of the acting out and the working through that have taken the centre stage in studying trauma. Acting out is a symptom of compulsive repetition of traumatic memory and working through is one in which critical engagement was brought in allowing the transformation to take place. In his writing, it is evident that the moral duty of literature lies in bringing memory and mourning together.

When discussing the feminist trauma, Laura S. Brown (2004) criticizes the old psychiatric frames neglecting the systematic oppression and violence of sex differences. According to Brown, it is impossible to remove trauma out

of the scope of the power system, especially, patriarchy and societal marginalization. This female paradigm renames trauma as having taken root in socio-political facts, having a pivotal role in literature appearing in abusive and survival and resistance.

Judith L. Herman (2004) also discusses clinical aspects of trauma by analyzing the impact of trauma on mental health of the victim of crime. Herman emphasizes the need to recognize, validate and acknowledge recovery processes under the law. Her work strengthens the fact that testimony and narrative articulation is an imperative to psychological healing, which is quite popular in literature on trauma.

E. Ann Kaplan (2005) critically analyzes the cultural/media discourse of trauma. Kaplan examines the mediation of the media and the literature on terror, loss and political violence in the post-9/11 environment. According to the research, trauma stories of the modern society frame both the collective memory and identity, and tend to alternate between compassion and sensation.

Reaching the postcolonial aspects, Stef Craps (2011) snitches at the prevalence of the Western theory of trauma and demands a more comprehensive, diverse, and inclusive system, on a global scale. Craps suggests that in the study of trauma, colonial violence and displacement and structural injustice history should be taken into consideration. Irene Visser (2015) proclaims this viewpoint even further and points out that the postcolonial approach should be incorporated into the analysis of trauma. In her article, Sonya Andermahr (2016) also proposes decolonizing the study of trauma by encouraging researchers to listen to the marginalized, as well as other forms of healing?

Robert A. Neimeyer (2006) discusses narrative reconstruction as one of the therapeutic techniques and suggests the idea of re-storying loss. Neimeyer asserts that people can contribute to the development by building their life stories in a manner that inculcates a traumatic episode to meaningful contexts. This

is similar to the literary descriptions of survival and regeneration.

Anne Whitehead (2004) analyzes literary form and narrative technique and focuses on post-1990 fiction and fragmented form of text as a reflection of disturbing memory. J. Pederson (2014) comes back to the theory of literary trauma, debunking its assumptions and recommending the more adaptable perception of representation. Kalí Tal (2007) highlights politics of pain and ethical aspects of telling the story of suffering by stating that Trauma narratives should be responsible in a manner that does not undermine their authenticity.

Resilience studies are an additive process to the trauma theory, which emphasizes on adaptive processes. Gill Windle (2011) purposefully presents a review of the concept of resilience in terms of a dynamic, instead of a static personality trait. Such a conceptualization justifies literary approaches to present characters re-assembled after crisis. Lastly, the article by Lyndal Bond et al. (2007) shows the effectiveness of social connectedness in facilitating mental health and favorable developmental progress. Despite its focus on adolescence psychology, the results help support one major theme of trauma narratives, which is that community attachments and relationships aid in recovery. Together, these scholars make trauma a multidimensional concept that has the elements of psychological rupture, cultural memory, political power, and narrative reconstruction. There is the observed shift in the literature as from individual pathology to collective, contextual and decolonized paradigm. It also stresses the curative role of telling stories and makes literature an important domain where one can survive and revive.

i. Trauma

The term trauma is used to enumerate an overwhelming psychological impact that affects the subject of the feeling of safety, identity and continuity. It goes against all common sense since, unlike the general

suffering, trauma overwhelms the mind to handle events during the time they happen. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as belatedness, or in other words, it recurs in intrusive images, imaginations or refiners' way after the happening of the event. Trauma discontinuous disorder of memory and forms the gaps in the narrative coherence which complicates the experience description by the survivors. Trauma in a literary context is not an objective state of mind or even a narrating problem because authors strive to show what should not be spoken or understood. Therefore, trauma turns into a theme issue and an organizing force of storytelling.

ii. Literary Healing

Literary healing is a healing process of the narration and its ability to process and integrate traumatic experiences. Pain may be given a symbolic expression and redefined with help of literature. Judith Herman underlines that recovery consists of remembrance and re-connection; in the same way, the literary narratives construct the space where the repressed memories are unknown and accepted. The forms of texts convert solitude of suffering to solidarity as standing texts use metaphors, discourse and narration perspectives. Literary healing is not the total elimination of the trauma but it means the incorporation of the painful memory into a system of meaning. Literature turns into an outlet of emotion and a process of re-creating consciousness by expressing repressed experiences.

iii. Survival Narratives

The survival narratives focus on people or groups who find themselves in disastrous situations and fight on to survival. They transcend suffering to portray survival, empowerment, and valor. The process of overcoming obstacles and challenges, negotiating memory and mending fragmented identities frequently appear in survival stories featuring characters that have to face such difficulties. Here especially is applicable the

idea of working through that Dominick LaCapra has suggested because the narratives of survival show how repeated suffering slowly turns into the reflexive perceptiveness. These texts are concerned with human ability to endure in the situation of prevalence. Survival stories, then, serve as not only witnesses, but ways of showing how to survive.

iv. Memory

The concept of memory is central to the works concerning the trauma because traumatic experience is usually marked by fragmentation or distortion. Instead of the linear memory, the trauma memory can be in the form of flashback, silence or repetition symbolically. The narrative configuration of memory has been proposed by philosophical insights authored by Paul Ricoeur; his philosophical writings imply that one reconstructs memory through narrative configuration. In literature, characters re-visit the past experiences in order to re-read and re-conceive them. Cultural identity is also determined by the collective memory because a community keeps suffering and resistance history among them. Storytelling can therefore play the role of an archive of pain as well as of understanding and continuity.

v. Identity Reconstruction

Trauma interferes with narrative identity by breaking the coherence upon which people comprehend themselves. The process of identity reconstruction is the reconstruction of fragmented perceptions about one-self into a renewed perception of continuity. The process of the reinterpretation of the past and the reconstruction of the future is dramatized in literature because some characters reevaluate their past and create their own future. Narrative can enable people to reverse their position beyond victimhood to survivorship as people with agency. Literary characters re-create themselves through a process of introspection and dialogue, including the trauma as part of a larger narrative of life. The

reconstruction of identity then becomes one of the core elements of the literary healing process of changing rupture into reconfiguration.

vi. Narrative Therapy

The development of narrative therapy began in the late twentieth century by Michael White and David Epston and the theory is based on the concept that people create meaning by way of stories. This treatment method challenges one to externalize problems and rewrite his life scripts. It is often reflected in literary works, in which characters express their strains and redefine themselves. Transformational storytelling allows psychological distancing and reflection by converting the chaos to systematic story narratives. Narrative therapy describes the power of language to help people heal and be able to transform, and this approach illustrates the role of storytelling in building initiatives that bring about change.

vii. Resilience

Resilience can be described as the ability to adjust, survive, and develop in spite of the bad. In the trauma literature, resilience is not represented as refusal of pain but the ability to tackle painful experiences and work with them. Resilience according to psychological studies by Ann Masten is called ordinary magic, now pointing out that resilience is gained by the ordinary people capabilities, like relationships, hope and meaning making. Stories in literature have a way of showing strength by showing how characters reconstruct their relationships, take back their agency and to develop hope. Resilience is therefore more of a process and not a stable attribute dependent both on self-will and a social system.

viii. Renewal

Trauma stories Renewal is a process that is more of transformation and not a mere recovery. It is the process of rethinking life after the trauma and imagining of possibilities. The past is not forgotten as renewal details it

and the new definition of the future brings it in as part of memory. Symbolic renewal, reconciliation or even creative expression is often a part of literary portrayals of renewal. In narratives closure or open-ended possibility texts indicate that survival is likely to result in growth and self-understanding. Renewal therefore will be the top of the healing in literature where the suffering is not denying but passing through meaning-making.

ix. Cultural Trauma

Cultural trauma is more than a personal psychological issue; it can be applied to the overall group of people whose identity is disturbed due to this. Sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander believes that cultural trauma exists when individuals belonging to a group of people feel that they have received a gruesome experience that leaves unforgettable impressions on the group consciousness. Literature has become an important tool of expression of such colonial agony, and remembrance as well as forging community. Communities renegotiate the historical trauma and create new mass identities through discourse of displacement, conflict or systemic oppression. The literary of cultural trauma thus serves as a repository, as well as a catalyst, to make sure that no one forgets or suppresses the pain required by the masses.

Final conclusion:

In this paper, the author has discussed trauma not only as a mental sore, but as a complicated individual, cultural and moral phenomenon that recreates identity and memory. Based on interdisciplinary knowledge, the paper shows that traumas prevent a sense of continuity (both individual and communal) by shattering memory and destabilizing identity. Nonetheless, literature comes out as a strong tool with which such fragmentation may be expressed, perceived, and slowly incorporated. Silence can be turned into testament and suffering can be downgraded into useful patterns of narratives through storytelling.

The paper also illustrates that literary healing is primarily based on the survival stories. Such stories not only describe their subjects as victims but also as people who can survive and recover. The process of healing does not imply a lack of the traumatic memory but incorporation of the past into a new identity of the human being. The literary protagonists strive to endure the changing and transforming process through memory work, relational bonds and creative re-envisioning of the future.

Also, such diversification of trauma studies into the postcolonial and decolonizing paradigms leads to the understanding that the inclusion of diverse cultural backgrounds and marginalized voices is critical. All traumas are different in history of colonization, displacement, gendered violence, and institutional injustice. The site whereby these stratified experiences can be held, challenged and redefined becomes literature. So, that way it promotes group publicity and cultural preservation.

Finally, this paper provides the argument that literary healing is in the process of rebuilding the stories. Survivor stories and renewal stories confirm the ability of the human being to make sense despite a catastrophe. Literature can provide but not close but continuity, that is, a place where memory, identity and hope can be sustained through organization of chaos into a narrative form. Experience may be broken by trauma, though by telling stories, people and groups can reclaim voice and agency, as well as renewal.

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