

FRAGMENTED MEMORY AND NARRATIVE FORM IN CONTEMPORARY WAR NOVELS: A TRAUMA-THEORETICAL READING OF *ANATOMY OF A SOLDIER*

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of psychological trauma in Harry Parker's Anatomy of a Soldier (2016), focusing on its use of fragmented memory and innovative narrative techniques. The research applies Sigmund Freud's early trauma theory and Cathy Caruth's framework of trauma to argue that the novel's disjointed chronology, episodic storytelling, and object narration reflect the protagonist's fractured psychological state. In this context, memory serves as both a vessel for trauma and a means of eventual healing, illustrating the dual nature of recollection in the trauma recovery process. The study employs a qualitative textual analysis to explore how Parker's narrative structure mirrors the cognitive and emotional impact of war trauma, particularly the dissociation and fragmented self that characterize traumatic experiences. The analysis reveals how Parker's narrative strategies such as non-linear storytelling and the use of objects as narrators engage with the psychological, emotional, and moral dimensions of trauma. This work contributes to literary trauma theory by demonstrating the intricate relationship between narrative form and the lived experience of psychological injury, highlighting the role of literary techniques in representing complex traumatic realities.

Keywords: trauma, memory, narrative form, object narration, fragmented storytelling

Introduction

Introduction to Trauma in War Literature

War has always been a matter of deep psychological trauma, as soldiers usually come back home after the war, not only with wounds but also with a set of emotional traumas that are not as obvious but equally disastrous. These complex experiences have been historically depicted in literature, offering insight into how such a war impacts the mind and soul. The mental consequences of war, and especially the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), have become a leading theme in modern war fiction. The genre of literature has also developed to capture a more subtle sense of trauma, with the heroism no longer being simplistic as the trauma of war, but of a more complex nature of traumatic memory loss, moral trauma, and the sense of self changing. The experiences disrupt the continuity of the individual and the sense of belonging, creating a division between the person before the trauma and the person after it. Trauma is not just an occasion but a violation of the brain, mind, and body functioning, but the consequences of the trauma have long-term effects and reverberate throughout the lives of a person, as Van der Kolk (2014) outlines. The psychological aftermath is not only a matter of memory but also the reworking of neural pathways that shape how people experience and process the world. Further, Perry and Daniels (2023) discuss the neurobiology of PTSD in combat veterans, explaining that the trauma permanently leaves an imprint on the brain, which usually leads to hypervigilance, numbness, and constant reexperience of the traumatic incident. This discontinuity tends to find its reflection in war writing through the use of narrative devices, including non-linear narrative, unreliable narrators, and multiple viewpoints, to depict the fragmented, incoherent quality of traumatic memories. These techniques not only draw attention to the disorder and disorientation of war but also to the challenges of reinventing their broken selves into the world they inhabit.

Harry Parker's *Anatomy of a Soldier* and Its Narrative Innovation

The book *Anatomy of a Soldier* by Harry Parker (2016) is a new and original way of describing the themes of psychological trauma in war literature. Unlike traditional war novels, which use a human protagonist or first-person narration to address trauma, Parker employs object narration to tell the story of Captain Tom Barnes, a soldier who has been critically wounded on the battlefield. The objects in the novel, such as prosthetic legs, helmets, and medical equipment, take over the narration, and the reader views the protagonist's trauma from a close yet distant perspective. Such a technique in narration centers on the objects the protagonist carries, externalizing his or her internal conflict and offering a new interpretation of dissociative, fragmented trauma. Object narration in *Anatomy of a Soldier* depersonalizes the reader, conveying the soldier's immediate emotional response and reflecting the protagonist's emotional disconnection and numbing as he tries to make sense of what he is going through in the war. The novel, through the objects, addresses the question of how the identities of the soldiers are transformed by their traumas and the dehumanizing effects of war. Such a non-conventional approach to narrative also indicates the main character's disjointed memory, which is neither continuous nor complete, a peculiarity of trauma itself.

Research Purpose

This study aims to discuss how trauma is represented in *Anatomy of a Soldier* through its fragmented memory and novel narrative methods. The purpose of this work is to discuss how the novel's object and episodic narration point to the psychological alienation caused by war trauma and to provide a special insight that enables the reader to experience the main character's trauma. The study will explore the role that the construction of trauma in the novel plays in relation to modern-day theory on trauma by exploring the nature of the representation of trauma in the novel and how it relates to our comprehension of the emotional and psychological effects of war.

Literature Review

Freud's Early Trauma Theory

The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, is one of the first people to introduce the concept of trauma as a psychological phenomenon that interferes with the mental process of processing and incorporating painful experiences. His initial theory on trauma, especially as developed in the works of Freud in the book *Observation on Transference-Love* (1915), was that childhood traumas, as they were repressed by the mind, were usually too great to be fully understood in the right moment. Freud believes that the repressed memories remain in the unconscious mind, where they may lead to psychological disturbances, such as neurosis and hysteria. From this perspective, the trauma is not an isolated experience but a continuous disturbance of the psyche that affects thoughts and behavior even without the knowledge of the person. To Freud, traumas are not events, but rather the dislocation of the mental state of the person. He maintained that trauma does not subside spontaneously, but would manifest itself in fragmented and intrusive forms, disrupting the sense of self and continuity of the life history of the person. This idea formed the basis of further theorists of trauma who applied the works of Freud to the literature and trauma fields.

Cathy Caruth and the Delayed Return of Trauma

Cathy Caruth (1996) developed the concepts of Freud and added to trauma knowledge, defining it as a delayed, repetitive, hard-to-articulate experience. Caruth believes that trauma is a post-factum experience and tends to interfere with the powers of the victim to talk about it when it happens. This lag in the process of experiencing trauma, in which the traumatic experience is not fully processed at the moment by the person experiencing it, is a source of what Caruth calls the unclaimed experience, where the memory of the event in the mind of

the subject is reawakened later, and as a fragment, or symbolically. The theory of trauma as a delayed reaction has become a key to trauma theory, particularly in the literature studies, proposed by Caruth. The recurrent aspect of trauma, the way the past intrudes upon the present, oddly and suddenly, is comparable to the fragmentation in narratives that is typical of trauma literature. The use of literary devices such as non-linear narrative, fragmented memories, and shifts in narration helps describe the delayed return of trauma. In the book *Anatomy of a Soldier*, e.g., this discontinuous narration resembles Caruth's theory, as it reflects a fractured memory of the main character and a fragmented traumatic condition.

Memory as a Dual Agent

Memory has a two-fold role in trauma literature: it is the place of traumatic experiences, but can also be used as a healing tool. The role of memory in the trauma literature is usually enacted as a place where the past, specifically the traumatic, was maintained and re-examined. Nevertheless, it is in this revisitation that people can even process their trauma and start healing. Characters in war literature can replay on their experiences a number of times, which can be torture and at the same time a curative process. Memory, therefore, is both a wall and a passage: it isolates the person as it preserves the trauma; it can also be a means through which people can re-socialize their experiences into a coherent self-story. In *Anatomy of a Soldier*, memory is a process of inscription that preserves traumatic events and shapes the main character's identity. Nevertheless, it can heal as well. When the protagonist re-experiences traumatic events as he recollects them, he starts integrating them into his self, which is the general trauma recovery process happening. According to literary critics such as Vickroy (2015) and Torres and Li (2025), trauma narratives often represent the effort to build the self using memory, particularly when characters seek to represent meaning to their traumatic experiences. The fight to tell one of the traumas is crucial for the emotional and psychological recovery of the sufferer. The memory in this case is the one that reminds us of the past and can be used to reconcile in the end. The healing process is possible as the character reflects on the memories.

Parker's Object-Centered Narrative

Harry Parker uses object-centered narration, which is one of the most innovative elements of *Anatomy of a Soldier*. The objects used in this novel, like the prosthetic limbs, helmets, and medical equipment, are presented by the narrators to tell the story of Captain Tom Barnes. This literary device enables the reader to feel the main character's psychological trauma through inanimate objects, a unique method of externalizing internal suffering. The objects that retell the story are not just passive; on the contrary, they actively engage in the presentation of trauma. Being on par with Barnes, the objects can be regarded as symbols of dislocation that happens due to trauma, with the focus on the gap between the emotional reality and the life lived by the protagonist. This method portrays the dissociative aspect of trauma, where the subject, in most cases, experiences disconnection from their feelings and memories. The voices of the objects enable the novel to examine the deconstructed heart of trauma, as each object narrates a portion of the main character's events and experiences. When Parker shifts the center of interest from the human perspective to inanimate objects, she emphasizes the dehumanizing nature of war. As narrators, objects are not just witnesses but also representatives of the protagonist's loss of agency and selfhood. This literary device enables Parker to deal with trauma in a manner that could not be done with a first-person or third-person narrative that reveals the sense of alienation and dissociation that usually comes with psychological trauma.

Research Questions

1. How does *Anatomy of a Soldier* use fragmented narrative and object narration to represent psychological trauma?

2. In what ways does memory function as a medium for trauma inscription and as a precursor to healing in the novel?

Theoretical Framework

Freud's Trauma Theory

This idea of traumas as mental intrusion, which interferes with cognitive and emotional processes, proposed by Sigmund Freud, gives the basics of the psychological impact of traumas in literature. According to Freud, especially in his publication *Observation on Transference-Love* (1915), the theory of trauma holds that it is an occurrence or occurrences that the mind cannot process right at the moment. These traumatic events, instead, invade the individual's consciousness, usually in disruptive and recurring forms. The recollection of trauma, as Freud declared, is repressive, and it can only be recalled as fragmented parts, which causes the mental processes of the individual to be fragmented and discontinuous. This model focuses on the radical discontinuity introduced by the trauma, in the sense that the person is not able to incorporate the traumatic memory into a logical story. There is a disorientation of mental functioning, reflected in the disjointed narrative structure of *Anatomy of a Soldier*. The nonlinear, fragmented narration depicts the protagonist's broken memory, which cannot be fully processed or recalled in a logical sequence. The episodic nature of the novel makes it possible to get hints of trauma, just like there is a repetitive and intrusive nature of traumatic memories, which Freud describes. The inner world of the protagonist, condensed in the narration of objects, is a metaphor for the mind's damage. In the same way that Freud opined that trauma might make the mind disjointed and incapable of combining the memories in a natural manner, the novel by Parker dynamically mirrors these disturbances.

Caruth's Trauma Framework

Cathy Caruth (1996), expounding the ideas of Freud, developed the theory of trauma as a delayed and repetitive experience, which can not be directly expressed. According to Caruth, no trauma can be perfectly understood or represented when it happens, but it comes back in a delayed and fragmented manner. She states that trauma is not an event, but rather the experience of the event once it has happened. Such a cyclical effect of trauma leads to repetition, where the victim will keep experiencing the trauma over and over again, unable to articulate it or even to incorporate it into their life story. The novel's disjointed structure, with time not flowing linearly and the narrative perspective shifting abruptly, reflects Caruth's idea of trauma as a delayed, recurring experience. The main character, Tom Barnes, lives his trauma in things, and this aspect makes him narrate in bits, which only makes sense after a long time. Similar to Caruth, who defines trauma as something one cannot comprehend at the moment, the reader learns of the protagonist's trauma in a fragmented manner through the object narrators. This postponed and shattered form of narration imitates the mental process of re-experiencing trauma.

Narrative and Psychological Representation

The theory of literary trauma connects narrative techniques and trauma as a psychological experience. This theory suggests that fragmentation, unreliable narrators, and non-linear narratives are not just stylistic choices; they are necessary for depicting the psychological impacts of trauma. Balaev (2014) states that these techniques are often used in trauma literature to show the cognitive and emotional discontinuity in people who have experienced traumatic events. Narrative fragmentation, then, is used to present the disordered, incoherent nature of traumatic memories that do not follow a straight line. In *Anatomy of a Soldier*, the episodic narration and focus on objects create a disjointed narrative that depicts the protagonist's trauma. Each object revealing part of the story offers a biased perspective on what happened to Barnes and shows the disjointedness of trauma recall. These literary

methods allow the character's psychological condition to be externalized, as Balaev notes, through the narrative form. The novel's discontinuous, episodic structure is not only a formal choice but also mirrors the protagonist's internal psychological discontinuity from trauma.

Methodology

Qualitative Textual Analysis

For this study, a qualitative textual analysis was employed to examine how trauma is represented in *Anatomy of a Soldier*. Qualitative analysis is particularly suited to trauma literature, as it allows for a deep, interpretive exploration of the text's narrative structure, themes, and characters. By focusing on the narrative's fragmented and episodic structure, this methodology aims to uncover the psychological underpinnings of the novel's representation of trauma. The method of close reading was used to identify patterns of fragmented memory, trauma, and object narration. In this way, it is possible to discuss how certain narrative techniques (changes in point of view and the narration of objects) disclose the protagonist's psychological fragmentation. Trauma literature is one genre where close reading works especially well, as it helps showcase the minor narrative techniques used by the authors, which form part of the depiction of the internal, frequently fragmented experience of trauma. Using qualitative research methods, the study explores the narrative frame, language, and symbolism of the work, discussing how they help present the theme of psychological trauma. This method also provides an opportunity to explore how literary devices, such as the divided narrative and the narration of objects, reflect the traumatic experience and help create the general image of mental displacement.

Data Selection

The scenes to be analyzed have been chosen for how they portray issues of trauma, the remembrance of memories, and the application of an object-centric point of view. These are essential scenes that can be used to comprehend how Parker uses object narration as a way of alienating the trauma of the protagonist. The important scenes are those in which the main character communicates with objects that reveal his experience, such as when Barnes thinks of his artificial legs or his medical gear after the war. These items serve as intermediaries between the protagonist's inner pain and the audience, and between the trauma and the reader. The selection criteria of these passages are made on the basis of their relevance to the manifestation of the trauma and the possibility of emphasizing the fractured character of memory and the psychological consequences of war. Those few passages chosen provide a hint to the psychological condition of the protagonist and, in particular, the fragmented, dislodged, and frequently disorderly recollection of trauma. The review of these critical points will aim to discuss how the narrative techniques Parker employed can reveal evidence of trauma, memory, and healing.

Discussion and Analysis

Fragmented Narrative as Trauma Representation

The disrupted, non-linear shape of *Anatomy of a Soldier* is a direct indication of the fractured psychological condition of the main character, which reflects the intrusive and unprocessed essence of trauma. This discontinuous narrative form is central to the depiction of trauma in its disruptive effect on consciousness continuity, just as trauma does not allow the victim to connect traumatizing memories into a consistent self-story. The novel's structure, through Caruth's (1996) theory of trauma as a delayed return, depicts trauma not as an event but as a repetitive and persistent intrusion of the past into the present. As Caruth sees it, trauma cannot be directly expressed, and it manifests itself in disjointed and fragmented shapes many years after the event in question. This is not a one-off event but a recurring thing, continually returning to the survivor's psyche. The fragmented nature of traumatic memory is reflected in Parker in *Anatomy of a Soldier* through the episodic style, in which every object serves as a

narrator of various aspects of his protagonist's life. The storyline skips through time, and the abrupt changes lack a linear order. This is an intrusion of traumatic memories into the present, as this narrative discontinuity displays that the protagonist is unable to entirely move past the past. The fractured structure reflects the psychological alienation of the trauma experience, with no straightforward way of processing memories, but rather, they recur randomly, disjointedly, in an intrusive fashion. This non-linear structure is an indication of the inability of the trauma victim to reassemble the past in a coherent, logical progression, and this only brings out the long-term psychological effects of war. The fragmentation narrative technique enables Parker not only to depict the psychological fragmentation of the main character but also to recall an idea expressed by Caruth: when it occurs, trauma is never completely worked through but returns in unexpected ways.

Object Narration and Embodied Trauma

In *Anatomy of a Soldier*, the protagonist's story is told through prosthetic limbs, helmets, and medical equipment, which serve as mediators between the protagonist's personal pain and the reader's comprehension of the trauma. This is a convincing method of narrating that is object-centered, and it enables the reader to be exposed to trauma in a second-hand, but a first-hand manner. These objects not only witness the traumatic events but are also involved in the trauma of the main character. To illustrate, the artificial leg becomes a representation of physical and psychological damage, encapsulating the main hero's pain and the protagonist's estrangement from his own body. The objects serve as the means of representation of the trauma that affected the main character because the trauma is sometimes associated with dissociation, and individuals tend to feel out of their bodies and out of their minds. The objects in war literature, as Alexandra (2018) explains, are usually used as metaphors to depict the dehumanizing nature of war. The objects in *Anatomy of a Soldier*, as the narrators underline, highlight the protagonist's alienation and the disappearance of selfhood, one of the effects of trauma. The objects tell the story in their own unique ways, presenting a disjointed yet heart-rending account of the main character's injuries and the emotional stress of war. This literary device emphasizes the depersonalization the soldiers undergo as their identities become more like body parts and objects, and are stripped of the identities they once had. The complexity of trauma is also emphasized in the use of objects as mediators between trauma and its representation. Having eliminated the human narrator, Parker compels the reader to experience the protagonist's plight from a neutral yet most sympathetic position, thereby reflecting the emotional and psychological detachment of trauma survivors towards their own experiences.

Memory as Trauma Inscription and Precursor to Healing

Memory in *Anatomy of a Soldier* is not only a repository of trauma, but also the beginning of recovery and psychological rebuilding. The memories the main character recalls of his war experience, especially the vivid memories of the battlefield, medical practice, and personal loss, serve as documentation of the trauma and as a way for him to begin interpreting his experiences and fitting them together. Trauma narratives tend to portray memory as aeters and otherets, as Vickroy (2015) posits, as it is not only a hindrance to healing but also the ability to retain painful events as well as a mechanism that will eventually lead to recovery. The main character in *Anatomy of a Soldier* is constantly returning to his traumatic memories, particularly as he encounters items that detail his experiences. These memories are not fixed, as the objects are revisited and redefined, which implies a tedious, though painful, process of incorporating them. The process of remembering in the novel, though hurtful, also provides some way to recovery. Through the process of memory and its frequent reoccurrence throughout the story, the protagonist gets a chance to confront his trauma and get used to it. Nevertheless, that is not a linear and simple process; instead, it is the reflection of the broken

reality of trauma as well, and another memory brings another dimension to the psychological healing of the protagonist. Therefore, memory is both the imprint of the trauma and the key that opens the door to healing.

Ethical and Aesthetic Implications

The symbolism of trauma in the story "Anatomy of a Soldier" raises major ethical and aesthetic issues. On the one hand, the novel's disjointed plot and objective narration create an emotionally powerful image of trauma without exploiting the protagonist's misery. Through the inanimate-object narrators, Parker separates the reader from the protagonist's immediate emotional suffering and invites the reader to be more reflective and empathetic toward the trauma. This is a narrative technique consistent with the fallacies of modern trauma literature, which emphasize ethical witnessing and the author's duty to present trauma without making it exploitative or voyeuristic for the audience (Balaev 2008). Parker employs fragmented, object-focused narration in *Anatomy of a Soldier*, suggesting that he is trying to portray trauma responsibly. The novel makes the reader empathize with the main character's anguish through indirect narration, rendering the story of war trauma more comprehensible without turning it into a mere storytelling device or a show. Furthermore, the aesthetic decisions made in the novel, including its experimental form, episodic structure, and symbolic use of objects, oppose the conventional war fiction written in a direct, linear style. Not only do these decisions indicate the broken mental condition of the main character, but they also suggest that readers reconsider the ways in which trauma may be presented in literature and interpreted. Thus, the novel contributes to the further development of the war literature genre by introducing a more sophisticated, complex, and ethically accountable portrayal of psychological trauma.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

This study has discussed how *Anatomy of a Soldier* employs fragmented narrative, object narration, and memory to denote psychological trauma. The non-linear plot developed in the novel and episodic narration testifies to fragmentation and recurrence of trauma, which resembles the shattered psychological condition of the protagonist. The narration through objects effectively externalizes the protagonist's trauma and provides a distinctive view of the dehumanization of war. Furthermore, the memory serves as a storage of trauma and a hope of possible recovery, and the recollections of his traumatic experiences by the main character precondition the psychological recovery. On the whole, Parker's novel offers an interesting depiction of the intricacies of war trauma, making a significant contribution to the literature of trauma today.

Contribution to Literary Trauma Theory

Anatomy of a Soldier contributes greatly to literary theory on trauma in the sense that it examines the convergence of narrative structure and psychological trauma. The novel rejects traditional narrative, and its fragmented, object-oriented form is perceived as a more effective representation of the psychological alienation of trauma. Emphasizing the protagonist's inner world through externalized objects, Parker's work offers new ways of depicting trauma in literature, stretching the limits of narrative innovation. This novel not only adds to the current discussion of trauma theory but also offers an impressive reflection on how the war affects the human psyche.

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