

FRAGMENTED MEMORY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM IN ANNE MICHAELS' *HELD*

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Abstract

*This study examines the representation of fragmented memory and psychological realism in *Held* through a close textual analysis. Drawing on trauma theory and memory studies, the research explores how the novel disrupts linear narrative structure to reflect the disjointed nature of traumatic experience. The findings reveal that Michaels uses non-linear temporality, repetition, and symbolic imagery to portray memory as unstable and associative rather than coherent. At the same time, psychological realism is achieved through deep interiority, embodied experience, and the limitations of language in expressing trauma. The analysis further shows that fragmented memory plays a significant role in shaping identity, particularly through intergenerational transmission and emotional connections. Despite its focus on loss and disruption, the novel also highlights the potential of memory as a means of witnessing and partial healing. The study argues that *Held* offers a powerful literary representation of trauma by combining innovative narrative techniques with profound psychological insight.*

Keywords: fragmented memory, psychological realism, trauma theory, narrative structure, identity formation

1. Introduction

The novel *Held* (2023) offers a wide array of literary analysis options. Anne Michaels's novel is particularly valuable for discussing the relationship between fragmented memory and psychological realism. The narrative spans different time and place periods, from events during World War I to modern and futuristic settings. Furthermore, the author rejects a chronological approach to storytelling and opts instead for an unconventional narrative framework that juxtaposes narrative fragments into a cohesive whole (Michaels, 2023). As such, the nonlinear approach reflects the nature of human memory, which works through flashbacks and repetitions (Whitehead, 2004).

In particular, the novel *Held* centralises the issue of preserving the essence of memory and trauma. The story follows characters who have experienced the tragedy of war and the loss of loved ones and explores their emotions and experiences related to the topic. It is worth noting that all these stories are told through the prism of the characters' consciousness, and their inner world takes priority over plot developments (Cohn, 1978). In fact, this makes the novel an excellent subject for analysing the concept of psychological realism.

In particular, the use of fragmented narratives is a remarkable feature of the book, as it mimics the unstable, changeable nature of memories. Instead of presenting events as fully formed or finalised, they appear incomplete and layered, often even contradictory. In this way, scholars have noted that fragmented tales reflect the effects of traumatic experience on their protagonists in terms of their ability to remember and build their identity (Caruth, 1996). Thus, rather than weakening narrative coherence, the author's use of fragmentation adds to the psychological dimension of her story, thereby recreating the process of traumatising and memorialization.

Furthermore, the writer explores deeper philosophical themes of time, death, and the human condition. It should be noted that the memory, as used by Michaels, does not only mean remembering but also transforming the experience into an influential element of an individual's emotional and identity formation. For instance, Michaels argues that people possess personal and historical memories that become apparent only due to certain circumstances (Assmann, 2011).

In this way, it is worth noting that the connection between the ideas of fragmented memory and psychological realism will play a significant role in understanding why *Held* becomes relevant in today's literature. Here, one should consider the opportunity to use the technique of fragmented story to recreate the fragmented nature of life through the prism of trauma and remembering.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To examine how fragmented memory is represented through narrative structure and stylistic techniques in *Held*.
2. To analyse the role of psychological realism in depicting characters' inner consciousness, emotions, and trauma.
3. To explore the relationship between memory fragmentation and identity formation across generations in the novel.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How does *Held* employ fragmented narrative techniques to represent memory and trauma?
2. In what ways does psychological realism shape the portrayal of characters' inner experiences in the novel?
3. How does the interaction between fragmented memory and psychological realism contribute to the construction of identity in *Held*?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The present paper is valuable for literary analysis, as it contributes to current literary criticism by exploring the narrative and psychological dimensions in *Held*. The paper discusses issues related to fragmented memory and psychological realism to demonstrate how modern narratives differ from classic ones in their depiction of human consciousness. In addition, the research provides valuable insight into the field of trauma and memory studies in relation to the representation of disruption owing to war, loss, and emotional inheritance. Thus, fragmentation can be regarded not only as a narrative technique but also as a means of conveying the fragility of memory and the persistence of the past.

2. Literature Review

There has been a growing interest in fragmented memory and psychological realism in contemporary literary criticism, particularly in relation to interdisciplinary areas such as trauma studies, memory studies, and narrative theory. Scholars have increasingly pointed out that modern literature rejects conventional linear narration to capture the intricate workings of the human mind, particularly those related to trauma and memory. The novel *Held* by Anne Michaels is an example of literature written against this critical backdrop.

2.1 Trauma Theory and Fragmented Memory

The idea of fragmented memory is inherent to psychoanalytic theories and the theory of trauma. Some of the roots of this notion go back to the works of Sigmund Freud, according to whom traumatic experiences cannot be fully comprehended at once and may later appear in distorted or fragmented form (Freud, 1920/1955; Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). Furthermore, based on Freud's theories, Caruth (1996) suggests that trauma implies an experience that does not allow for representation; instead, it occurs as repetitions, blanks, and breaks in time. Thus, Caruth defines trauma as an event marked by "belatedness" one that can only be experienced indirectly

through memories rather than through remembering (Caruth, 1996; Felman & Laub, 1992; Whitehead, 2004).

The fragmented nature of memory has become the cornerstone of literary studies. Literary scholars claim that narrative fragmentation corresponds to the disruptions caused by a traumatic experience (Whitehead, 2004; Balaev, 2012; Luckhurst, 2008). In other words, trauma narratives are often told using a non-linear plot, episodic form, and temporal disruption (Caruth, 1996; Herman, 1992; LaCapra, 2001). Consequently, it is safe to assume that such narrative strategies represent a fragmented structure of consciousness and identity created by trauma (Rothberg, 2000; Tal, 1996).

Further contributions of LaCapra (2001) distinguish between the processes of "acting out" and "working through" trauma, thus drawing attention to the repetitive and incomplete character of traumatic memories. In the same vein, Herman (1992) focuses on the impact of trauma on narrative, especially in violent and catastrophic events. The aforementioned approaches collectively support the assumption about the inherent fragmentariness of traumatic memories and their embodiment in literary works (LaCapra, 2001; Herman, 1992; Caruth, 1996; Whitehead, 2004).

From a psychological point of view, dissociation is characterised by fragmented memories, implying the failure to integrate cognitive and affective components of experience (van der Kolk, 1994; Brewin, 2001). Traumatic experiences tend to be encoded irregularly, resulting in memories that lack narrative continuity (van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995; Brewin et al., 1996). As can be seen, psychological theories of traumatic memories are consistent with literary descriptions, which use fragmentary narrations as tools to recreate the experience of a traumatised person (Whitehead, 2004; Luckhurst, 2008).

2.2 Memory Studies and Cultural Memory

Another theoretical approach to fragmented narratives can be found in memory studies. The notion of collective memory was introduced by Halbwachs (1992) and defined as a socially constructed phenomenon. It was later elaborated on by Assmann (2011), who distinguished between communicative memory and cultural memory, with the latter denoting the institutionalisation of long-term memory forms (Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann, 2011; Erll, 2011). When discussing memory in literature, it is necessary to consider how it is represented and described in texts. More specifically, memory is commonly understood as an inconsistent, selective, and subject to personal and cultural influences phenomenon (Erll, 2011; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, & Levy, 2011). The notion of "post memory" has been introduced by Marianne Hirsch (2012) and is associated with the intergenerational transmission of trauma (Hirsch, 2012; Hirsch, 2008).

Literature and Partition narratives provide an insight into the workings of fragmented memories in representing historical traumas (Pandey, 2001; Tal, 1996; Rothberg, 2000). Here, memory is represented in fragmentary form, with flashbacks and disruptions of timelines, which can be seen as a reflection of individual and collective traumas of loss (Balaev, 2012; Luckhurst, 2008). Hence, literature serves as a means of reconstructing histories of oppression and exclusion through innovative narrative modes (Erll, 2011; Whitehead, 2004).

Anne Whitehead (2004) highlights the notion that trauma fiction employs narrative techniques distinct from conventional realistic techniques to represent the unrepresentable. According to Whitehead, fragmentation, repetitions, and gaps characterise trauma fiction, which is an outcome of the need for mimicking the psychological processes of traumatic recall (Whitehead, 2004; Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001). This is especially true for the case of *Held*, where memory is not a static repository but an ever-flowing process.

2.3 Psychological Realism and the Consciousness

Psychological realism is another important tool in studying contemporary fiction. Unlike the realism associated with external happenings and surrounding environments, psychological realism focuses on the internal life of the characters, their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions (Cohn, 1978; Lodge, 1992). According to Cohn (1978), narrative forms that are typically used to depict mental processes include stream-of-consciousness narration, interior monologue, and free indirect discourse.

It is also necessary to mention authors such as Henry James, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce, who have contributed significantly to the development of psychological realism in literature (Humphrey, 1954; Bradbury, 1993). Their literary works demonstrate how narrative form can represent subjective experiences, merging past and present (Cohn, 1978; Lodge, 1992). Psychological realism remains topical in contemporary fiction, where it often coexists with fragmented narration (Whitehead, 2004; Luckhurst, 2008).

2.4 Psychological Realism and Interior Consciousness

Another significant tool for analysing contemporary literature is psychological realism. While traditional realism centres on external activities and social surroundings, psychological realism involves character interiority and the process of thinking and experiencing (Cohn, 1978; Lodge, 1992). According to Dorrit Cohn (1978), examples of psychological realism include. The representation of traumatic experience within trauma narratives requires the application of psychological realism, which helps readers and scholars to grasp the true meaning and importance of such experiences (Caruth, 1996; Herman, 1992). Academics state that the depiction of trauma is impossible without the shift from objective external reality to subjective internal reality, that is, without considering how events are understood and experienced by a person (LaCapra, 2001; Rothberg, 2000).

Psychological realism is one of the major elements of trauma narratives. Scholars claim that trauma narratives need to be presented with the help of psychological realism. To accurately capture the experience of trauma, scholars believe that authors should focus on presenting internal realism rather than external realism, and the process of traumatisation should be shown by how the event is perceived and experienced rather than how it happens (LaCapra, 2001; Rothberg, 2000). One tool that can help present the traumatic event through internal realism is fragmented narration (Tal, 1996; Balaev, 2012).

Recent studies have shown a strong link between psychological realism and narrative fragmentation. The nature of traumatisation causes the fragmented structure of trauma narratives because the psyche of an individual after experiencing trauma tends to become fragmented. According to Kali Tal (1996), trauma does not affect just memory; it also influences one's identity. In this respect, literature serves as a medium for exploring such disruptions (Whitehead, 2004; Rothberg, 2000).

2.5 Fragmentation as Narrative Strategy

The trend towards fragmentation is becoming a distinctive characteristic of modern literature, especially those stories that address issues of memory and trauma. Postmodern and modern literature have embraced non-linear temporal structures and adopted a fragmented, multi-perspective form of narration (McHale, 1987; Hutcheon, 1988). The use of fragmented narratives defies conventional standards of coherence and calls for the reader to actively participate in meaning-making (Hutcheon, 1988; McHale, 1987). While critics like Brian McHale (1987) and Linda Hutcheon (1988) have suggested that postmodern literature utilises fragmentation to interrogate notions of stability in truth and representation, in the case of trauma fiction, fragmentation plays a different role by acknowledging the psychological and emotional realities of trauma (Rothberg, 2000; Whitehead, 2004). Michael Rothberg (2000) presents the notion of "traumatic realism", in which elements of realism and experimental

narratives merge in order to convey the story of trauma (Rothberg, 2000; Caruth, 1996). The fragmented narrative structure proposed by Rothberg creates an interplay between the possibilities and impossibilities of representing trauma.

2.6 Memory, Identity, and Intergenerational Trauma

The connection between identity and memory is crucial in the context of trauma studies and literature. Researchers claim that memory affects identity throughout people's lives; thus, identity is constantly redefined by memory and experience (Hall, 1990; Assmann, 2011). Traumatic experiences have a significant impact on identity, resulting in its fragmentation (Tal, 1996; LaCapra, 2001). Identity in trauma narratives is conceptualised as a process of constructing one's identity rather than being it (Hall, 1990; Erll, 2011). In such cases, identity is usually portrayed as fragmented due to disruptions in memory and continuity (Luckhurst, 2008; Balaev, 2012). Intergenerational trauma makes this connection even more complicated as it refers to the way in which the experiences of previous generations affect those of later generations. Marianne Hirsch's concept of post memory focuses on intergenerational effects on identity, especially in cases of traumatic events experienced by earlier generations (Hirsch, 2012; Hirsch, 2008). Thus, novels based on historical events demonstrate how characters' identities are shaped by fragmented memories that require interpretation (Rothberg, 2000; Whitehead, 2004). According to recent studies, fragmented memories serve as a tool for healing and reconstruction (Balaev, 2012; van der Kolk, 2014).

2.7 Anne Michaels and Trauma Fiction

Anne Michaels is known as an author who contributed significantly to the development of trauma fiction in Canada through her novel *Fugitive Pieces*. According to literary critics, Anne Michaels uses highly lyrical language, narrative fragmentation, and deep psychological elements to examine such topics as memory, loss, and trauma (Whitehead, 2004; Luckhurst, 2008). In addition, Anne Whitehead (2004) identifies several writers who contributed significantly to the development of trauma fiction as a literary genre, including Anne Michaels. Like *Fugitive Pieces*, the novel *Held* features the characteristic use of fragmented narrative that includes several time frames and perspectives (Michaels, 2023). At the same time, the novel touches on topics popular among modern writers, namely memory, trauma, and emotional inheritance (Rothberg, 2000; Whitehead, 2004).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design as it entails the interpretation and analysis of literary text rather than numerical data. Qualitative research is appropriate for this paper's literary analysis, as it involves a thorough examination of themes, narrative strategies, and stylistic aspects in the literary text.

3.2 Research Approach

Analytical and descriptive approaches will be used in conducting this research, as it involves close reading and theoretical interpretation of the novel. In addition, close reading helps to critically examine and analyse language, structure, and narrative strategies. At the same time, the latter facilitates the interpretation of those in the framework of trauma theory and psychological realism.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

The following theoretical perspectives will form the basis of this interdisciplinary approach and be utilised for the analysis of the subject matter.

Trauma Theory (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001), for the analysis of fragmented memory and its reflection in the psychological effect of trauma, as well as delayed memory. Memory Studies (Assmann, 2011; Halbwachs, 1992), for the analysis of personal and collective memory as

processes of constructing and passing across time. Psychological Realism (Cohn, 1978), for the analysis of characters' consciousness, feelings, and experiences.

3.4 Data Source

The main data to be used in this study is the book *Held* by Michaels (2023). Relevant passages, episodes, and perspectives will be studied for signs of fragmented memory and psychological realism. Additional information will be obtained from scholarly works, including books, journals, and other critical essays on trauma theory, memory theory, narrative theory, and psychological realism. These secondary data will help interpret the findings based on the text in question.

3.5 Sampling Technique

To select the extracts from the novel, purposive sampling will be employed. Extracts will be chosen based on their relation to the subject matter, especially those that:

- Reflect the fragmented nature of the narrative in relation to the timeline, discontinuity, and sequence;
- Convey the mental state of the characters mentioned
- Talk about trauma, loss, and generational memories.

3.6 Data Analysis Method

- Thematic/textual analysis will serve as the main data analysis method to be used in this study. The process of analysis will involve:
- Close reading: In-depth review of the passages selected for analysis.
- Thematic coding: Organising these passages into themes like memory, fragmentation, identity, and psychological depth.
- Interpretation: Interpreting these themes using the theoretical framework.
- Delimitations of the Study
- The study is confined to the following:
- The examination of one literary work, namely "*Held*"
- An investigation of certain ideas: fragmented memory and psychological realism
- A selection of certain excerpts from the text, and not the whole text in its entirety
- Other dimensions could have been investigated, but will be outside the scope of the study.

4. Data Analysis

In this section, the literary work *Held* (Michaels, 2023) is examined using critical reading. The themes of fragmented memory and psychological realism will be examined by exploring their manifestations in the narrative construction, the writing style, and the characters.

4.1 Theme 1: Fragmentation in Storytelling as a Representation of Memory

Non-Linearity in Time

The novel employs a fragmented narrative structure through various times and locations, which is typical of the non-linearity of memories. This can be seen in the first image, "The shadow of a bird moved across the hill; he could not see the bird" (Michaels, 2023, p. 8). This imagery implies incomplete perception and serves as a metaphor for a fragmentary memory in which only fragments are perceived, not the complete experience. There is an example of fragmentation in John's wartime experience: "Memory seeping. The snow fell, night and day, into the night again. Silent streets; impossible to drive. They decided they would walk to each other across the city and meet in the middle" (Michaels, 2023, p. 9). The abrupt transition from physical pain to memory illustrates the way trauma disrupts linear time and compels one to relive past experiences in the present without any regulation.

Repetition and Memory Patterns

Fragmentation is made stronger by repetition. “It is my mother,” (Michaels, 2023, p. 39), expresses shock and repetition of trauma recognition. In the knitting metaphor, “the deliberate error by which each knitter could identify her work” (Michaels, 2023, p. 12) illustrates that memory can hold distinctive marks, implying that identity is formed from fragments. Childhood memories endure; for instance, “His child-hand in his mother’s hand. The paper bag of chestnuts” (Michaels, 2023, p. 10).

4.2 Theme 2: Psychological Realism Through Interiority

Inner Consciousness

The book depicts profound introspection. John thinks, “Perhaps the most important things we know cannot be proven. He did not believe that the mystery at the heart of things was amorphous or vague or a discrepancy, but a place in us for something absolutely precise.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 8). In this quote, one can observe a contradiction between abstract thinking and the feelings experienced by people, and see how psychological realism reveals inner confusion.

Grief in Helena is depicted via actions: “In the middle of the night, Helena put a sweater over her nightgown and went into the garden. There she burned the backdrops she had painted, the perfect summer-lit path, the moonlit lake, the orchard full of birds. In the morning, when she woke, she smelled the smoke in her hair before she opened her eyes. However, she would not wash herself in water that came from that river.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 46). Here, one can see how the experience of trauma is shown in actions and sensation rather than explained directly.

Limits of Language and Trauma

Language often fails to capture trauma: “He would not let her describe it. Each straining word in its inadequacy, a kind of lie. He needed words as uncompromising as numbers, the zero in an equation.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 34). It implies that traumatic events cannot find adequate expression in words and, therefore, cannot be adequately captured in language. Similarly, memories can be expressed through art, “In the hospital at Sarnesfield,’ Gillies said, ‘there was a nurse, the Miss Ella Leather. She sang to us when the ward was dark, with only a little lamp by each bed...” (Michaels, 2023, p. 15). Here, the artistic mode emerges as another way of conveying traumatic experiences.

Body as Site of Memory

Memory is also physical.

“He’d saw off his leg himself if he believed it would stop the pain, but he knew it would never be gone, even when he was.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 24). This highlights how trauma is encoded in one’s body and cannot be removed from their being consciously. Intimacy also exists within the body: “Her breasts fit perfectly in his hands.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 15). This demonstrates how intimacy is conveyed through physical perception.

4.3 Theme 3: Memory Fragmentation and Identity Formation

Memory is transmitted from generation to generation:

“Each village with its own stitch; you could name a sailor's home port by the pattern of his gansey, which contained a further signature, a deliberate error by which each knitter could identify her work.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 12). This indicates that an individual's identity forms in accordance with inherited patterns. “If a sailor lost his life at sea, before his body was committed to the deep, his gansey was removed and returned to his widow. If a fisherman washed ashore, he was carried home to his village, the stitch of his sweater as good as a map.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 13). In this case, memory becomes a tangible concept, helping to preserve identity even after death.

Presence of the Dead

Life and death become indistinguishable:

“The negative had been completely clean, John had placed the holder in the camera himself, he had taken the photograph himself, poured the developer himself. There was no possibility of tampering.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 35). This suggests that the emotional truth can surpass rational understanding. “It is my mother” (Michaels, 2023, p. 39) reinforces the persistence of memory as lived reality. “Everywhere the dead are leaving a sign. We feel the shadow but cannot see what casts the shadow.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 65). These phrases highlight the significance of the past, which remains integral to the present.

Photography and Memory

Photography mirrors memory, for example, “In a long exposure, anyone who moves is invisible, only those who are still are perceivable.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 36). In this line, memory captures static things while excluding any changes and movements from its scope. “He was not credulous; he knew that our needs find their own methods, but no spectre had ever appeared to him in the trenches, no apparition, despite his need. Perhaps we are sent only exactly the kind of proof we can believe.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 36).

Love as Memory

“Desire permeates everything; nothing human can be cleansed of it.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 8) The statement reveals emotional continuity. “Everyone thinks that memory loss is the end... He was his own ghost, aware in a way we cannot understand.” (Michaels, 2023, pp. 78–79). Here we see that love keeps memory alive. It shows that identity remains intact despite memory loss.

4.4 Theme 4: Stylistic Techniques

Compression and Minimalism

“After the ceremony, they had tea at the church, and then Ruth had to catch the train home. His mother took the train in the opposite direction. They spent their wedding night above the pub where they had met, in rooms kept for the rare traveller or a customer who had had too much.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 32). This shows how simple narration conveys complex emotional meaning. “When I got back to your mother’s, the house was gone.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 34) This reflects how trauma is expressed through minimal language.

Metaphor

“The moonlight silver iodide. The photographic plate a supernatural lake, waiting for a reflection.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 46). This presents memory as a process of capturing and reflecting experience. “The sea, where, like memory, he had once written down the elusiveness of the form is the form.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 15). This shows that memory is fluid and cannot be fixed.

Parataxis

“The water he washed in smelt bad in his helmet... ‘Gillies’ words were written just for him.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 15). This demonstrates association, not a linear thought process. “He felt no cold anymore. He was so still. He could see stars when he looked down.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 46). This is an example of disintegrated perception at the point of death.

Silence

For the rest of his life, my father was completely silent...” (Michaels, 2023, p. 78). This implies that silence can speak for itself. “The rain fell through nothing, an empty place in the sky” (Michaels, 2023, p. 34). This symbolises absence and loss visually.

4.5 Theme 5: Memory, Trauma, and Healing

Memory as Continuation

“His mother kept her list of questions in a diary beside her bed...” (Michaels, 2023, p. 33) Intellectual and emotional legacy is represented here by memory. “Helena painted a board until it was a square of night...” (Michaels, 2023, p. 27). Creative expression is used here as a coping strategy.

Witnessing

“What was Alan’s task? To write what no one could bear to read...” (Michaels, 2023, p. 70). It refers to remembering as an ethical obligation. “She told them about her friend...” (Michaels, 2023, p. 64). Here, the author shows memory as an act of oral transmission.

Possibility of Redemption

“In Mara’s experience, the supernatural was purely the presence of good...” (Michaels, 2023, p. 65). The author demonstrates that memory and love heal trauma. “Peter fell asleep at the table... and *Held* him in a pool of light.” (Michaels, 2023, p. 81). This ending symbolises the continuity of life after experiencing trauma.

5. Findings

This study reveals that fragmented memories serve as a central element of the plot of *Held* by Michaels (2023) and can be regarded as a fundamental component of the trauma theory. The author consistently disrupts the logical progression of events through the use of temporal constructs, rapid shifts, and recurring images. Such components may be perceived as trauma manifestations in cases when memories are fragmented and do not follow any coherent pattern. Examples such as “Memory seeping...” and the repeated image of “It is my mother” illustrate how the memories disrupt the plot at random, preventing the narrator from putting the narrative together. Therefore, following the trauma theory by Caruth (1996), the memories resulting from trauma experiences always have a deferred nature.

The next important insight related to the psychological realism in the novel is that this quality is achieved through interiorization and embodiment. Thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations of characters are represented in a way that makes the line between objective reality and the individual's subjectivity unclear. The process of coping with trauma that takes place within characters, like John and Helena, who conduct special rituals after losing someone, shows how trauma affects one's inner life and is experienced psychologically without any verbal expression. An important aspect to keep in mind is the fact that trauma can affect one's body by causing constant pain and sensation. Indeed, this phenomenon can be explained in accordance with psychological theories, which state that trauma influences one's cognitive experience and causes dissociation and distorts the concept of self (Herman, 1992). Another important aspect to take into consideration is the fact that traumatic experiences cannot be described through language.

Thirdly, one should focus on fragmented memory and its effect on identity and intergenerational connection in the novel. As can be seen in the novel, memories can travel from one person to another in many forms, both physical and non-physical, even though these memories remain fragmented. For example, motifs such as knitting patterns, photographs, and references to the dead show how fragments of memory can shape people's identities. Additionally, by including ghosts and merging life and death, the author demonstrates that the past has a certain effect on the present moment. However, fragmented memories can be seen both as sources of pain and healing, as demonstrated in the novel.

Table 5.1

Theme	Sub-Focus	Key Observation	Textual Evidence (Michaels, 2023)	Interpretation
Fragmented Memory	Non-linear structure	Narrative shifts across time and space without continuity	“Memory seeping...”; shifting war and personal memories	Reflects disjointed recall typical of trauma, where events are

Fragmented Memory	Repetition	Recurring phrases and images reinforce memory intrusion	“It is my mother” (p. 39)	not processed sequentially Shows how trauma repeats itself in consciousness and resists closure
Fragmented Memory	Symbolic motifs	Objects and images carry memory traces	Snow, river, photographs, knitting patterns	Memory is associative and encoded through symbolic fragments rather than linear narration.
Psychological Realism	Interior consciousness	Deep focus on thoughts and perceptions	John’s reflections on death and uncertainty (p. 16)	Demonstrates inner psychological conflict and subjective experience of trauma
Psychological Realism	Embodied trauma	Physical pain is linked with emotional suffering	“He’d saw off his leg...” (p. 24)	Shows that trauma is both psychological and bodily
Psychological Realism	Limits of language	Inability to fully express trauma verbally	“Each straining word... a kind of lie” (p. 34)	Suggests trauma exceeds language and requires indirect representation
Identity Formation	Intergenerational memory	Memory transmitted across generations	Knitting patterns identifying individuals (pp. 12–13)	Identity is shaped by inherited memory and cultural traces
Identity Formation	Presence of the dead	Blurring of life and death through memory	“Everywhere the dead are leaving a sign” (p. 65)	The past continues to shape present identity and consciousness
Identity Formation	Memory and love	Emotional bonds preserve memory	Letter: “I know you remember” (p. 22)	Love acts as a medium through which memory survives fragmentation
Healing and Meaning	Witnessing	Remembering as an ethical responsibility	“To write what no one could	Memory becomes an act of testimony and

Healing and Meaning	Reconstruction	Fragmented memory allows partial healing	bear to read” (p. 70)	moral engagement

6. Conclusion

This study finds that the notion of fragmented memory and psychological realism presented by *Held* should be considered as two closely intertwined narrative strategies that reflect the reality of traumatic experiences of their victims. Through non-linear narration, repetition, symbolism, and the characters' inner consciousness, *Held* creates an image of the disrupted, associative nature of a victim's memory of a traumatic experience. It was revealed that trauma is the cause not only of fragmented memory, but it is also the agent for the transformation of one's identity, which extends from one generation to another by means of emotions, things, and narratives. Moreover, memory serves as the vehicle for processes of witnessing, sense-making, and recovery. Future research on this topic might apply a comparative methodology to analyse similarities between this novel and other works on traumatic experiences, specifically postcolonial and war fiction. Another promising area of investigation would be the use of digital methods of analysis, such as corpus linguistics, to identify recurring patterns and lexical variation in narratives about traumatic experiences.

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