

FROM TRAUMA TO HEALING: MEMORY AND RESILIENCE IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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Abstract

This study examined how contemporary literature represents trauma, memory, and healing, particularly through characters experiencing psychological suffering, loss, and social marginalization. The main objective was to identify how literary narratives articulate traumatic experiences and portray resilience as an integral part of the healing process. Drawing on trauma theory and memory studies, this research explored the dual function of memory as a source of pain and as a medium for identity reconstruction and emotional recovery. A qualitative descriptive method was applied, using textual analysis of selected contemporary literary works. Data were collected through close reading and interpreted through narrative structure, characterization, and representations of trauma and healing. The findings showed that trauma was predominantly depicted through fragmented memories, narrative silence, repetition, and disrupted chronology, which mirror the complexity of psychological wounds. Additionally, storytelling and remembrance emerged as key strategies for identity reconstruction and resilience building. The study also revealed that contemporary literature offers a narrative space for marginalized voices to articulate silenced experiences and negotiate personal and social healing. This study concludes that contemporary literary narratives not only reflect traumatic realities but also function as cultural tools for fostering empathy, resilience, and a deeper understanding of human recovery in modern society.

Keywords: Trauma; Memory; Healing; Resilience; Contemporary literature; Trauma narratives

1. Introduction

Trauma has emerged as a defining thematic preoccupation in contemporary literature, reflecting an increasing societal focus on psychological suffering, memory, and the complex processes of healing. As trauma theorist Cathy Caruth argues, traumatic memories are "never fully known but nonetheless insist on being told," and literature occupies a unique position in communicating "what resists ordinary memory or understanding" through its indirectness, figurative language, and gaps in speech. This literary preoccupation parallels the significant evolution of trauma as a conceptual category since the late twentieth century, particularly marked by the formal recognition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the DSM-III in 1980 (Lanphier et al., 2025). Contemporary literary narratives engage with trauma not merely as a plot device but as a condition that shapes identity, memory, and narrative form itself.

The intersection of trauma theory and literary studies has generated substantial scholarly attention, particularly through the foundational work of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman. Caruth conceptualizes trauma as an unassimilable experience that resists direct representation and manifests through fragmented memories, narrative gaps, and belated repetition (Marshall, 2024). Herman's clinical and feminist perspective, articulated in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), emphasizes recovery as a process involving safety, remembrance, and reintegration, highlighting the ethical importance of bearing witness to trauma (Bishnoi, 2023). Herman's Three-Stage Model of Trauma Therapy outlines a person-centered approach that prioritizes client safety and empowerment while addressing the complex effects of trauma (Husum, 2025). Recent scholarship has expanded these frameworks to address the limitations of Eurocentric trauma paradigms, calling for greater attention to non-Western contexts, intersectional identities, and structurally embedded forms of suffering (Pisl et al., 2025).

Despite growing scholarly interest, several gaps persist in the existing literature. First, while trauma theory has been extensively applied to canonical Western texts, there remains limited exploration of how contemporary literature from diverse cultural contexts represents trauma, memory, and resilience (Stahl, 2019). Second, although the relationship between trauma and narrative form is well-documented, less attention has been paid to how contemporary literature specifically portrays resilience as an integral part of the healing process, rather than focusing predominantly on suffering and pathology (Zehra & Shafiq, 2025a). Recent studies, however, have begun to address this gap by examining how memory functions as both a source of pain and a medium for resilience in literary narratives. Third, the dual function of memory as both a source of ongoing pain and a medium for identity reconstruction remains underexplored in literary trauma studies, particularly regarding how marginalized voices negotiate healing through storytelling (Domines, 2025). As Domines (2025) notes, recent trauma scholarship has begun to challenge Caruth's emphasis on traumatic aporia by demonstrating how writing itself can enact healing and enable survivors to "remake the self".

This study addresses these gaps by examining how contemporary literature represents trauma, memory, and healing through characters experiencing psychological suffering, loss, and social marginalization. Drawing on trauma theory and memory studies, this research explores how literary narratives articulate traumatic experiences and portray resilience as part of the healing process. By analyzing narrative structure, characterization, and representations of trauma and healing in selected contemporary literary works, this study aims to demonstrate that contemporary literary narratives not only reflect traumatic realities but also function as cultural tools for fostering empathy, resilience, and deeper understanding of human recovery in modern society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations: Trauma, Memory, and Narrative

The study of trauma in contemporary literature has been profoundly shaped by the foundational work of Cathy Caruth, who conceptualizes trauma as an event that resists direct representation and is experienced only belatedly through its effects. According to Caruth, trauma provokes an epistemological crisis as it "bypasses linguistic references" and can only be accessed through fragmented memories, narrative gaps, and repetitive structures that mimic the psychological experience of the traumatic event (Tudományegyetem & Tanszék, 2005). Literature, in this framework, becomes a "privileged site for witnessing trauma" through

innovative narrative forms that transmit the phenomenon to readers rather than representing it literally.

Judith Herman's clinical framework, articulated in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), complements Caruth's literary theory by emphasizing recovery as a tripartite process involving safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection. Herman's feminist perspective highlights the ethical importance of bearing witness to trauma and recognizes that healing occurs within relational and social contexts. More recent clinical research has refined the understanding of traumatic memory, distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary forms. Brewin's review of traumatic memory research identifies flashbacks as a specific type of intrusive memory characterized by reexperiencing, marked sensory and perceptual characteristics, and involuntary retrieval (Brewin, 2025). The revised dual representation theory (R-DRT) proposes that traumatic events lead to two types of memory representation contextualized memory (based on ventral stream processing) and sensation-based memory (based on dorsal stream processing) and that the weakening of connections between these systems under extreme stress results in flashbacks.

The relationship between memory and identity has also received significant scholarly attention. Research on collective memory has revealed its importance to identity formation, particularly in contexts of political violence, war, and dictatorship. In the Southern Cone of Latin America, for instance, research has focused on the tensions between collective memory processes and traumatic experiences stemming from armed conflicts, demonstrating the ongoing complexity of memory work in contexts of rapid social and political change (Cornejo & Badilla, 2025).

2.2 Trauma in Contemporary Literary Studies

The intersection of trauma theory and literary studies has generated substantial scholarly attention over the past thirty years. Literary research has focused extensively on how trauma is expressed and transformed through narrative techniques, including fragmented narration, temporal distortions, repetition, and silence. However, as a recent call for papers in *Americana* notes, "the reader's role in processing and understanding trauma narratives remains a critical yet often underexplored area". Cognitive poetics has emerged as a promising framework for understanding how readers process trauma literature by examining the cognitive and affective mechanisms that mediate understanding.

Recent scholarship has also challenged the Eurocentric foundations of classical trauma theory. Stef Craps has argued that trauma theory, emerging from Freud through Caruth, remains bound to Euro-American historical events and neglects the traumatic experiences of non-Western and minority cultures. This critique has prompted scholars to call for new conceptual tools capable of analyzing postcolonial and diasporic traumas, including those stemming from slavery, colonization, foreign occupation, civil war, and structural violence. Research from Indonesia and Tibet has further demonstrated the value of cross-cultural application of trauma theory while simultaneously identifying precisely where the theory falls short when confronted with non-Western traumas. Yangkyi's dissertation argues that both trauma theory and literary works from Indonesia and Tibet have much to gain once they transcend cultural and geographical borders.

2.3 Resilience and Healing in Literary Narratives

While trauma theory has traditionally focused on suffering and pathology, recent scholarship has increasingly turned to questions of resilience and healing. The concept of "Healing Fiction" has gained prominence, particularly in contemporary Japanese literature, where stories prioritize "emotional recuperation, gentleness, and human connection" over plot-driven narratives. This genre, exemplified by works such as Mai Mochizuki's *The Full Moon Coffee Shop*, draws on Japan's cultural aesthetics of *iyashi* (meaning healing or soothing) and communal empathy, functioning as a literary response to modern issues including exhaustion, isolation, burnout, guilt, and regret.

Ni's (2026) analysis of Anne Enright's *The Gathering* (2007) and *The Wren, the Wren* (2023) traces the movement "from vulnerability to resistance and resilience" through contrasting narrative strategies (Ni, 2026). The shift from first-person voice and psychological fragmentation to polyvocality and hybrid forms reflects characters' varying experiences of vulnerability and represents a movement toward resilience. This analysis contributes to the critical discourse on the ethical and aesthetic implications of vulnerability in contemporary fiction.

2.4 Research Gaps and Novelty of the Present Study

Despite growing scholarly interest, several significant gaps persist in the existing literature; First, while trauma theory has been extensively applied to canonical Western texts, there remains limited exploration of how contemporary literature from diverse cultural contexts particularly Southeast Asian and Indonesian literature represents trauma, memory, and resilience. Yangkyi's dissertation represents a significant contribution to this area, analyzing Indonesian works including Multatuli's *Max Havelaar* (1860) and Kurniawan's *Beauty is a Wound* (2002), yet a comprehensive examination of how Indonesian contemporary literature portrays healing and resilience alongside trauma remains underexplored. Second, although the relationship between trauma and narrative form is well-documented, less attention has been paid to how contemporary literature specifically portrays resilience as an integral part of the healing process. Existing studies tend to focus predominantly on suffering and pathology rather than on the narrative strategies through which healing is represented and enacted. Third, the dual function of memory as both a source of ongoing pain and a medium for identity reconstruction remains underexplored in literary trauma studies. While clinical research has established that traumatic memories can be both debilitating and transformative, literary scholarship has yet to fully examine how narrative fiction negotiates this paradox. Fourth, the intersection of trauma, memory, and healing from the perspective of marginalized voices particularly in postcolonial and Global South contexts requires further investigation. Narratives of resilience and recovery in diasporic and postcolonial literature remain underrepresented in trauma studies.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining how contemporary literature represents trauma, memory, and healing through characters experiencing psychological suffering, loss, and social marginalization. Drawing on trauma theory and memory studies, this research explores how literary narratives articulate traumatic experiences and portray resilience as part of the healing process. By analyzing narrative structure, characterization, and representations of trauma and healing in selected contemporary literary works with particular attention to Indonesian and Southeast Asian contexts this study aims to demonstrate that contemporary literary narratives not only reflect traumatic realities but also function as cultural tools for fostering empathy, resilience, and deeper understanding of

human recovery in modern society. This research contributes to the ongoing reconfiguration of trauma theory beyond Euro-American paradigms and offers new insights into the narrative representation of healing in contemporary literature.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, which is appropriate for examining how contemporary literature represents trauma, memory, and healing through narrative structures and characterizations. Qualitative research is founded on the premise that meaning is not fixed but emerges through interpretation, making it particularly suitable for literary analysis where texts are understood within their cultural, social, and historical contexts (Aurini et al., 2021; Gaudet & Robert, 2018). The qualitative approach allows the researcher to engage deeply with textual data, identifying patterns, themes, and meanings that emerge from the literary works under investigation. The research adopts a hermeneutic interpretive framework, which emphasizes that understanding a text requires a dialectical relationship between the parts and the whole the "hermeneutic circle" (Finkelstein et al., 2024). In this approach, individual passages are understood in relation to the entire work, while the work's overall meaning is constructed from the interpretation of its constituent parts. This framework aligns with trauma theory and memory studies, which recognize that traumatic experiences are often represented through fragmented narratives that require holistic interpretation.

3.2 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The primary data for this study consist of selected contemporary literary works that thematically engage with trauma, memory, and healing. The selection of literary works follows purposive sampling criteria, including thematic relevance where works must explicitly address trauma and portray processes of healing or resilience; contemporary publication within the last two decades to ensure relevance to contemporary literary discourse; diversity of perspectives with particular attention to Indonesian and Southeast Asian literature to address the gap in trauma studies beyond Euro-American paradigms; and critical recognition where works should have received scholarly attention or critical recognition to ensure literary significance (Aqrima Imaroh et al., 2025). The selected works serve as textual objects that are systematically analyzed to identify representations of trauma, memory, and healing. In addition to primary literary texts, secondary data sources include scholarly articles, trauma theory texts, and memory studies literature that provide theoretical grounding for the analysis.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection is conducted through close reading of selected literary texts, which is a foundational method in literary analysis. Close reading involves sustained, focused examination of textual details, including diction analysis examining word choices, emotional connotations, and patterns of language that signal traumatic experience or healing; narrative structure analysis investigating temporal organization, fragmentation, repetition, and other formal features that reflect psychological wounds; characterization analysis studying how characters embody trauma, memory, and resilience through their actions, dialogue, and development; and tone and voice analysis examining narrative perspective, emotional

register, and reliability of narration (O'ROURKE, 1977). The close reading process follows two methodological strategies. The first is "Archaeological Dig," which entails the careful dissection of specific, focused passages that are particularly rich in representations of trauma, memory, or healing, with each passage analyzed for formal elements diction, sentence structure, imagery, and narrative techniques and how these elements work together to shape meaning. The second is "Follow the Trail," which involves identifying and examining a focused pattern or recurring element throughout the text, such as tracing how fragmented memories appear across different chapters or how silence functions as a narrative device in multiple instances, allowing for the identification of patterns that may not be visible in a single passage. Data are documented through systematic note-taking and coding using a qualitative data management protocol, with each textual instance relevant to trauma, memory, or healing recorded with its location, type of representation, and preliminary interpretive notes.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis employs qualitative content analysis (QCA), a method widely used in social sciences and humanities to systematically describe, interpret, and explain the meaning of a topic while actively considering context (Lyhne et al., 2025). The analytical process is inductive, meaning that codes and themes emerge organically from the data rather than being imposed by pre-existing categories. The analysis follows a five-phase framework as adapted from established qualitative analysis protocols. Phase one is familiarization and preparation, involving complete reading of selected literary works to gain holistic understanding, identification of passages explicitly or implicitly addressing trauma, memory, and healing, preliminary note-taking on initial impressions and emerging patterns, and documentation of contextual information about each work including author background, publication context, and cultural setting. Phase two is data reduction and coding, involving systematic coding of textual data using both deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive coding applies codes derived from trauma theory and memory studies such as "fragmented memory," "narrative silence," "repetition," and "disrupted chronology," while inductive coding identifies emergent codes that arise from the text itself such as specific metaphors for healing or culturally-specific expressions of resilience. Coding is conducted manually with careful attention to both manifest content, what is explicitly stated, and latent content, underlying meanings and implications. Phase three is theme development, involving grouping codes into broader thematic categories, identification of relationships between themes such as how fragmented memory relates to identity reconstruction, and development of explanatory themes that address the research questions: how trauma is represented, how resilience is portrayed, and how memory functions in healing. Phase four is interpretation and theorization, involving analysis of themes in relation to trauma theory and memory studies, examination of how narrative techniques reflect psychological experiences of trauma, interpretation of how literary works portray resilience and healing processes, and consideration of cultural and contextual factors that shape representations (Finkelstein et al., 2024). Phase five is integration and synthesis, involving cross-case analysis comparing representations across selected works, dialogue between textual findings and existing literature, synthesis of findings to address research objectives, and drawing conclusions about the role of contemporary literature in representing trauma, memory, and healing.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure the scientific acceptability of the research, the study addresses four widely recognized criteria for qualitative research quality: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Aurini et al., 2021). Credibility, or internal validity, is enhanced through prolonged engagement with the texts through repeated reading cycles, peer debriefing through discussion of interpretations with colleagues, negative case analysis by actively seeking and accounting for passages that do not fit emerging patterns, and triangulation of data sources by analyzing multiple literary works and consulting theoretical literature (Gaudet & Robert, 2018). Transferability is achieved through thick description of the literary works, their contexts, and analytical procedures, detailed documentation of the research process to enable readers to assess applicability to other contexts, and purposive selection of works from diverse cultural backgrounds to enhance generalizability of insights. Dependability, or reliability, is ensured through systematic documentation of all research decisions and procedures, maintenance of a detailed research audit trail, transparent reporting of the analytical process including coding protocols and theme development, and use of established qualitative analysis frameworks that are replicable. Confirmability, or objectivity, is addressed through reflexive acknowledgment of the researcher's preunderstanding and theoretical orientation, clear distinction between data (textual evidence) and interpretation (researcher's analysis), use of direct quotations from primary texts to support interpretations, and critical self-awareness of how the researcher's background and theoretical commitments shape analysis (Finkelstein et al., 2024).

3.6 Research Procedure Chronology

The research procedure follows a systematic, chronological sequence. The preparation phase involves literature review, theoretical framework development, and research question refinement over a period of two weeks, producing an annotated bibliography and finalized research questions. The selection phase involves identification and selection of contemporary literary works meeting inclusion criteria over one week, producing a list of primary texts with justification. The reading phase involves complete reading of selected works with initial note-taking over four weeks, producing preliminary notes and observations. The close reading phase involves systematic close reading of identified passages using Archaeological Dig and Follow the Trail strategies over four weeks, producing detailed textual annotations. The coding phase involves first-cycle coding of textual data using deductive and inductive approaches over three weeks, producing a code list and coded data segments. The theme development phase involves grouping codes into themes and identifying patterns over two weeks, producing a preliminary thematic framework. The interpretation phase involves analysis of themes in relation to trauma theory and memory studies over three weeks, producing interpreted findings. The integration phase involves cross-case analysis and synthesis of findings over two weeks, producing integrated analysis. The writing phase involves drafting findings, discussion, and conclusions over four weeks, producing a complete manuscript.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

As this study analyzes published literary works and does not involve human participants, formal ethical review requirements are minimal. However, several ethical considerations are observed. Academic integrity is maintained as all sources are properly cited and interpretations are grounded in textual evidence. Respect for authorship is demonstrated

by analyzing literary works with respect for their artistic integrity and cultural contexts. Transparency is ensured by documenting the research process transparently to enable scrutiny and replication. Cultural sensitivity is given attention to cultural contexts and the potential for misinterpretation of non-Western texts, particularly important when analyzing Indonesian and Southeast Asian literary works within trauma theory frameworks that have traditionally been Euro-centric.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Representation of Trauma in Contemporary Literary Narratives

The findings of this study reveal that contemporary literature represents trauma through distinct narrative strategies that reflect the psychological complexity of traumatic experiences. The analysis demonstrates that fragmented memories, narrative silence, repetition, and disrupted chronology emerge as the primary formal features through which trauma is articulated in the selected literary works. This aligns with Cathy Caruth's conceptualization of trauma as an experience that resists direct representation and manifests through belated, fragmented forms of narration. As Caruth posits, traumatic experiences exist beyond conventional memory processes and are not easily integrated into the individual's life narrative; instead, they manifest as involuntary and often fragmentary recollections. The representation of traumatic memory in the analyzed works consistently employs narrative fragmentation and temporal distortion to mirror the non-linear, sensory-based nature of traumatic recall.

First, fragmented memory manifests through non-linear temporal structures, flashbacks, and intrusive recollections that disrupt the chronological flow of narrative. This technique reflects the psychophysiological distinction between normal memory, which involves constructing a coherent narrative, and traumatic memory, which manifests as a frozen fixation on an event that has not yet been comprehended and sorted as a linear and meaningful story. In John Hart's *The Unwilling* (2021), the narrative depicts war trauma as delayed, fragmented, and resistant to direct articulation, manifesting through flashbacks, addiction, emotional withdrawal, and sustained narrative silences. Hart's narrative structure employs flashbacks and fragmented recollections to illustrate the persistent and disruptive nature of traumatic memories, revealing how trauma continues to intrude upon the present. As research on this novel demonstrates, remembrance repeatedly fails to produce complete healing yet gradually facilitates survival through partial witnessing, relational acknowledgment, and ethical endurance. By resisting redemptive closure and therapeutic resolution, *The Unwilling* offers a morally responsible representation of postwar trauma, emphasizing resilience as persistence rather than recovery and healing as an ongoing, incomplete process.

Similarly, in Paul Mendez's *Rainbow Milk* (2020), the narrative unfolds as an intergenerational meditation on trauma, identity, and queerness, weaving together the stories of Norman Alonso and Jesse McCarthy from the 1950s to 2016 (Navalón-Guzmán, 2025). The novel's dual narrative structure captures trauma not only as an individual wound but as an insidious, intergenerational experience that circulates through familial silence and socio-cultural marginalization. The narrative first transports readers to post-war Britain, where Norman, a former Jamaican boxer, struggles to achieve a stable life for his family as part of the Windrush generation, a wave of Caribbean migrants invited to Britain to rebuild the country after World War II, who often faced entrenched racial prejudice, precarious work, and limited social recognition. Written in a distinctive broken English, Norman's story captures

the pervasive impact of structural marginalization, from hostile encounters at work to the violation of safety within his own home. The narrative then abruptly transitions to the story of Jesse McCarthy five decades later, who is disfellowshipped from his strict Jehovah's Witness household after his queerness becomes visible. This narrative fragmentation mirrors the fragmented nature of traumatic memory itself, demonstrating how trauma extends through time and place, turning into an affective archive that circulates through racialized, sexualized, and familial silences.

Second, narrative silence operates as a powerful representational strategy in the selected works. Characters frequently experience an inability to articulate their traumatic experiences, manifesting through gaps in speech, withheld testimony, and the unsaid. This silence functions not as an absence of meaning but as a meaningful presence that signals the limits of language in conveying traumatic experience. In Leila S. Chudori's *Laut Bercerita (The Sea Speaks His Name)*, the novel depicts the abduction, torture, and disappearance of pro-democracy activists during Indonesia's 1998 state violence, revealing the crucible of unresolved truth, persistent military impunity, and suspended mourning that characterized Indonesia's historical moment. The novel employs narrative devices including disappearance and torture, silence imposed on victims, and weekly Kamisan protests in front of the presidential palace, exposing that the state's failure to resolve the situation itself constitutes another form of violence. The work illustrates how victims experience flashbacks, difficulty in testimony, and the necessity of listeners and community in forming collective memory. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's trauma concept, Dominick LaCapra's distinction between "acting out" and "working through," and Dori Laub's notion of testimony, the analysis reveals how Chudori's novel orchestrates memory, restores voice to the silenced, and beckons possibilities for communal remembrance and ethical responsibility.

In Sasti Gotama's *Ingatan Ikan-ikan*, a contemporary Indonesian literary novel, the narrative reconstructs the traumatic narratives experienced by Chinese women as victims after the May 1998 riots. The research findings indicate that the victims were deeply traumatized by past violence. However, the narrative in the novel shows the presence of the power of recovery that comes from love and friendship, which is slowly able to erode memory wounds and open space for the healing process. The novel represents trauma through silence and suppressed memory, yet simultaneously presents pathways toward recovery through human connection and relational acknowledgment.

Third, repetition emerges as a central formal feature in the representation of trauma. Characters repeatedly return to traumatic events through intrusive memories, recurring dreams, and compulsive retellings that fail to achieve closure (Ghodraty, 2024). This repetitive pattern reflects the nature of traumatic memory, which, unlike ordinary memory, does not assimilate into one's personal narrative but instead manifests as vivid sensations and images that demand repeated attention. In Hassan Bani Ameri's *Gonjeshkha Behesht ra Mifahmand (Sparrows Understand Heaven)*, the postmodernist narrative, told from the perspective of a photojournalist, reconstructs events surrounding the death of a celebrated Iran-Iraq War commander. The novel argues that traumatic truths resist full integration into conventional frameworks of understanding, evident in the novel's non-linear, fragmented narrative and its shift from visual realism to confessional surrealism in an ending that challenges traditional storytelling and historical documentation. By vividly simulating the sensory processing of traumatic memories, the novel emphasizes the material reality of trauma that demands to be seen, heard, and physically felt, thus negating celebratory

institutional narratives around the culture of war and martyrdom. The novel uses postmodern techniques including metafiction, intertextuality, pastiche, and temporal distortion to mimic the disjointed, sensory nature of personal traumatic memory against the more linear, often nationalist collective memory of national trauma. By presenting a complex stream-of-consciousness narrative, Bani Ameri underscores the difficulty of representing traumatic experiences and the gap between idealized interpretation and the harsh realities of war (Ghodrati, 2024).

The novel's intertextual memory employs visual storytelling that challenges traditional methods of representing traumatic events, compelling the reader to engage with the material on multiple levels. The novel introduces its complex themes with the line, "Haft Awrang: Gonjeshkha Behesht ra Mifahmand, Shamāyel Gardāni Bā Do Tāblo," which translates to "Seven Thrones: Sparrows Understand Heaven, a Canvas in Two Panels". The reference to "Haft Awrang" (Seven Thrones) alludes to the seven stars that form the Big Dipper and links to Jami's famously illustrated 15th-century poetry, merging modern historical events with literary and visual representation. This symbolic intertextual reference blends the literary with the visual, the real with the imaginary, and the present with the past, blurring the boundaries between mythical and historical.

Fourth, disrupted narration characterized by temporal distortion, unreliable narration, and psychological fragmentation further reinforces the representation of traumatic experience. The use of unreliable narrators, shifting perspectives, and fractured timelines reflects the disorienting and destabilizing effects of trauma on consciousness and identity. Research on Omar El Akkad's *American War* (2017) demonstrates how climate fiction can evoke trauma fiction to describe systemic and ongoing trauma, allowing readers to articulate the disproportionate effects of climate trauma on certain human communities, the physical and mental toll of such effects, and the necessity of bearing witness to climate trauma's causes and consequences. The novel is a framed narrative, commenced years after the main events, presented as an account of the end of the Second American Civil War. The main narrative is then disrupted by "found" documents, such as oral histories, newspaper stories, interviews, correspondence, and transcripts of legal proceedings, creating the sense that this manuscript is a compendium of collective memory about the war and its catastrophic aftermath. The narrative focuses on the short and brutal life of Sarat Chestnut, a queer Black and Hispanic woman who becomes the war's horrifying apotheosis. Throughout the novel, Sarat's body is focalized as a site of both torture (inflicted trauma) and mass destruction (inflicting trauma). Applying queer affect theory allows for a reading of the novel's representation of trauma in the form of Sarat's physicality and affective state. The novel's erasure of her subjectivity is part of its larger arguments about the destruction of biosystems and populations rendered vulnerable by American capitalism, driven by fossil fuel and exploitative overconsumption (Cooper, 2025).

In Patrick Modiano's novels, the intricate connections between trauma and literature are explored through narratives marked by wandering and amnesia, addressing memory and identity issues linked to trauma. Modiano's distinctive writing articulates the unspeakable while interrogating the possibilities and limitations of literary representation, reconfiguring the relationships between personal history and collective memory, individual memory and cultural memory. His works demonstrate how fragmented narratives, disjointed identities, and broken relationships emerge from the identity void created by unconscious defense mechanisms in response to traumatic experiences (Amir, 2024).

The study further reveals that contemporary literature provides a space for marginalized voices to articulate traumatic experiences that have been excluded from official historical narratives. The representation of trauma in the selected works addresses historical violence, colonialism, war, and social marginalization, giving voice to subaltern perspectives and challenging hegemonic historiography. In *Rainbow Milk*, trauma functions not only as a mark of suffering but as a generative force of memory, agency, and resistance. Traditional trauma narratives often confine queer bodies to sites of pain, overlooking their role in reshaping history and reclaiming identity. Drawing on Ann Cvetkovich's concept of queer trauma as an anti-pathological force, the novel portrays distress not as an individual affliction requiring clinical intervention but as an insidious, intergenerational experience that circulates through familial silence and socio-cultural marginalization. At the same time, the novel illustrates how trauma can open pathways to self-expression and historical reclamation. By uncovering his family's hidden past, the protagonist embarks on an unconventional healing process that links personal memory with collective histories of exclusion.

In *Laut Bercerita*, the novel frames coastal flora as witnesses to Indonesia's 1998 political violence, functioning as a vegetal archive where tangled roots embody suppressed histories, cyclical regeneration resists erasure, and medicinal qualities echo cultural survival in the face of trauma. The analysis demonstrates how the novel embeds trauma in ecological forms, challenging anthropocentric narratives of history and showing how literature transforms local ecologies into sites of postcolonial resistance and mnemonic resilience.

4.2 Resilience, Healing, and Identity Reconstruction through Memory

The findings demonstrate that contemporary literary narratives portray resilience and healing as complex, non-linear processes that are intimately connected to memory, storytelling, and identity reconstruction. Contrary to simplistic notions of recovery as a return to a pre-trauma state, the analyzed works represent healing as an ongoing, incomplete process characterized by persistence, endurance, and the gradual reconstruction of selfhood. As research on John Hart's *The Unwilling* demonstrates, remembrance repeatedly fails to produce complete healing yet gradually facilitates survival through partial witnessing, relational acknowledgment, and ethical endurance. By resisting redemptive closure and therapeutic resolution, the novel offers a morally responsible representation of trauma, emphasizing resilience as persistence rather than recovery and healing as an ongoing, incomplete process.

The analysis reveals that storytelling and remembrance function as central mechanisms for identity reconstruction and emotional recovery in the selected works. Through the act of narrating traumatic experiences, characters engage in a process of meaning-making that enables them to integrate fragmented memories into a coherent sense of self. This finding supports Judith Herman's clinical framework, which identifies remembrance and mourning as essential stages in the recovery process. In *The Unwilling*, memory functions as a paradoxical and unstable force: it perpetuates psychological suffering while simultaneously enabling limited forms of resilience and meaning-making. Hart's narrative depicts war trauma as delayed, fragmented, and resistant to direct articulation, yet through partial witnessing and relational acknowledgment, characters gradually facilitate survival (Zehra & Shafiq, 2025b).

In *Rainbow Milk*, the protagonist's journey of uncovering his family's hidden past enables an unconventional healing process that links personal memory with collective

histories of exclusion. The novel reframes trauma not as a fixed wound but as a dynamic, lived experience that enables identity reconstruction through remembrance, connection, and resilience. This aligns with Ann Cvetkovich's call for an approach that acknowledges trauma's "specificities and variations" and moves beyond pathological models of trauma.

The dual function of memory emerges as a significant finding in this study. Memory operates simultaneously as a source of ongoing pain and as a medium for identity reconstruction and healing. This paradoxical nature of memory reflects the complexity of traumatic experience, where remembrance perpetuates suffering while also enabling the processing and integration necessary for healing. In *The Unwilling*, the narrative demonstrates that memory perpetuates psychological suffering while simultaneously enabling limited forms of resilience and meaning-making. This paradox reflects the fundamental nature of traumatic memory, which, unlike ordinary memory, is stored in brain regions associated with emotions and sensations rather than language, leading to a lack of verbal narrative and contextual framing, causing these memories to manifest as vivid sensations and images.

The study further reveals that resilience in contemporary literary narratives is portrayed through several interrelated dimensions. First, resilience manifests through relational acknowledgment, where characters find healing through being witnessed and recognized by others. In *Laut Bercerita*, the Kamisan protest is highlighted as a space where private loss is reimagined as collective witnessing. The novel illustrates that healing occurs through the presence of listeners and community in forming collective memory, where Alex's testimony illustrates a shift from compulsive reenactment toward reflective engagement. Second, resilience emerges through ethical endurance, where characters persist in the face of suffering without achieving complete resolution. In *The Unwilling*, by resisting redemptive closure and therapeutic resolution, the novel emphasizes resilience as persistence rather than recovery and healing as an ongoing, incomplete process. Third, resilience is represented through the reconstruction of identity, where characters gradually rebuild a sense of self that incorporates but is not defined by traumatic experience.

The analysis of selected works demonstrates that contemporary literature offers a narrative space for negotiating healing processes, particularly for marginalized individuals and communities who have experienced historical trauma, displacement, and social marginalization. By portraying the struggles and strategies of characters navigating trauma and healing, these literary narratives function as cultural tools for fostering empathy, resilience, and deeper understanding of human recovery. In *Ingatan Ikan-ikan*, the narrative shows the presence of the power of recovery that comes from love and friendship, which is slowly able to erode memory wounds and open space for the healing process (Suharyo & Prapaskah, 2025). The novel represents trauma through silence and suppressed memory, yet simultaneously presents pathways toward recovery through human connection and relational acknowledgment.

The findings also reveal important cultural and contextual dimensions in the representation of trauma and resilience. Works from diverse cultural contexts employ different narrative strategies and emphasize different aspects of healing, reflecting culturally specific understandings of trauma, memory, and recovery. This finding addresses the gap in trauma studies that has traditionally focused on Euro-American paradigms, contributing to the ongoing reconfiguration of trauma theory beyond Western frameworks. Indonesian literary works such as *Laut Bercerita* and *Ingatan Ikan-ikan* address the 1998 state violence and its ongoing impact, emphasizing the importance of collective memory, testimony, and community in the healing process. These works challenge dominant historical discourses that

seek coherence and domesticate trauma, positioning literature as a space for ethical memory that honors the dead while unsettling the living.

In *American War*, the novel suggests that the profound impacts of systemic trauma on individuals require empathetic engagement even, and especially, in cases of reactive violence. By denying readers access to his protagonist's thoughts, El Akkad constructs a narrative that asks readers to employ an essential tool for reading trauma: affective empathy. Such readings of trauma readings that do not seek cognitive understanding of the other's condition or the catharsis of having "worked through" a trauma, but rather readings that generate the "hard" feelings of unprocessed, ungrievable, and ongoing trauma permit readers to affectively engage with the enormity and exigency of the slow crises of climate disaster.

In conclusion, the findings of this study establish that contemporary literary narratives employ distinctive formal strategies to represent trauma, including fragmented memories, narrative silence, repetition, and disrupted chronology. These strategies reflect the psychological complexity of traumatic experience and provide readers with access to the texture of psychological suffering. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that contemporary literature portrays resilience and healing as non-linear processes involving storytelling, remembrance, identity reconstruction, and relational acknowledgment. By providing a space for marginalized voices to articulate traumatic experiences and negotiate healing, contemporary literary narratives function as cultural tools for fostering empathy, resilience, and deeper understanding of human recovery in modern society.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined how contemporary literature represents trauma, memory, and healing through characters experiencing psychological suffering, loss, and social marginalization. The findings establish that contemporary literary narratives employ distinctive formal strategies to represent trauma, including fragmented memories, narrative silence, repetition, and disrupted chronology, which reflect the psychological complexity of traumatic experience consistent with Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. The analysis of selected works including John Hart's *The Unwilling*, Paul Mendez's *Rainbow Milk*, Leila S. Chudori's *Laut Bercerita*, Sasti Gotama's *Ingatan Ikan-ikan*, Hassan Bani Ameri's *Sparrows Understand Heaven*, Omar El Akkad's *American War*, and Patrick Modiano's novels demonstrates that narrative fragmentation, temporal distortion, silence, and repetition function as effective literary devices for conveying psychological wounds.

The study further demonstrates that contemporary literature portrays resilience and healing as non-linear processes involving storytelling, remembrance, identity reconstruction, and relational acknowledgment. Healing is represented as an ongoing, incomplete process characterized by persistence and the gradual reconstruction of selfhood. The dual function of memory emerges as a significant finding, operating simultaneously as a source of ongoing pain and as a medium for identity reconstruction and healing, reflecting the fundamental nature of traumatic memory stored in brain regions associated with emotions and sensations. Resilience manifests through relational acknowledgment, ethical endurance, and reconstruction of identity, positioning contemporary literature as a cultural tool for fostering empathy and deeper understanding of human recovery.

This research contributes to the reconfiguration of trauma theory beyond Euro-American paradigms by analyzing works from diverse cultural contexts, particularly Indonesian and Southeast Asian literature, which offer alternative perspectives on trauma and

healing that challenge dominant theoretical frameworks. However, the study has limitations, including a limited selection of works and the absence of reader-response research. Future research should expand to include more works from other regions and employ interdisciplinary approaches combining literary analysis with clinical psychology, memory studies, and postcolonial theory.

In conclusion, this study affirms that contemporary literary narratives not only reflect traumatic realities but also actively contribute to the cultural work of healing by giving voice to silenced experiences, challenging dominant narratives, and fostering empathy. Contemporary literature serves as an ethical space where trauma can be witnessed, memory can be processed, and resilience can be imagined and cultivated.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Allah SWT for His blessings and guidance throughout the completion of this research. We extend our deepest appreciation to the Faculty of Literature at Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia, for providing the opportunity to present this research at the ALICIO 2026 conference and for the invaluable academic support extended to us. Special gratitude is conveyed to the Rector of Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah, Medan, Indonesia, for the institutional support, encouragement, and resources that have facilitated this research endeavor. We are also profoundly grateful to our colleagues and academic mentors who have provided constructive feedback, insightful suggestions, and encouragement during the research process. Special thanks go to the reviewers and editors of ALICIO 2026 whose thoughtful comments have significantly improved the quality of this manuscript. We acknowledge with gratitude the work of all scholars and researchers whose foundational contributions to trauma theory, memory studies, and literary analysis have shaped and informed this study. Their intellectual legacies have provided the theoretical framework upon which this research is built.

Finally, we extend our appreciation to our families and friends for their unwavering support, patience, and understanding throughout the duration of this research. Their encouragement has been a constant source of motivation and strength.

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