

THE UNREPRESENTABLE TRAUMA



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project entitled “The Unrepresentable Trauma” by Junekha Mary Jacob is a record of bona fide work carried out by the guidance and supervision of Dr. Jisha John, Assistant Professor, Department of English.

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Introduction

Trauma is a complex and deeply personal experience that can profoundly impact an individual's sense of self, emotions, and overall well-being. It is a response to distressing or disturbing events that overwhelm a person's ability to cope, often resulting in feelings of helplessness, confusion, and loss. While trauma is often associated with extreme situations like war, natural disasters, or personal assault, it can also be triggered by more subtle circumstances, such as losing control or abusing power. As a subjective experience, trauma is defined by the individual's response to the event, rather than the event itself. The project explores the theme of trauma in Paula Hawkins' gripping novel, *The Girl on the Train*. Through an in-depth analysis of the traumatic events in the book, the impact of trauma on the characters' lives and their journey towards healing and recovery will be examined. The study of trauma has become a critical topic in literary analysis and psychology, with scholars exploring the complex psychological and emotional effects of traumatic experiences on individuals. One influential theory in this field is that of Cathy Caruth, an American literary critic and trauma theorist. She suggests that trauma is an event that overwhelms an individual's capacity to respond, and is characterized by a delayed, fragmented, and repetitive process of remembering. She emphasizes the role of language and narrative in the healing process of trauma. Her theory has been highly influential in the field of trauma studies, particularly in the analysis of literary texts, where scholars have examined the formal innovations of texts and how innovations of texts and how they offer insights into the ways that

identity, the unconscious, and remembering are influenced by extreme events. Cathy Caruth is a prominent literary critic and trauma theorist, currently serving as the Frank H. T. Rhodes Professor of Humane Letters at Cornell University. She has previously taught at Yale and Emory University and was instrumental in building the Department of Comparative Literature. She received her Ph.D. from Yale University in 1988 and has since published several influential books and edited collections in the field of trauma studies. Her major works include *Empirical Truths and Critical Fictions: Locke, Wordsworth, Kant, Freud* (1991) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), which have been widely cited and have had a significant impact on the field of literary and cultural studies.

Cathy Caruth's work on trauma theory is particularly noteworthy for its emphasis on the role of language and narrative in shaping our understanding of traumatic events. She argues that trauma is not simply a physical or psychological experience but a deeply subjective and culturally mediated phenomenon that is shaped by the stories we tell about it. Her work has had a significant influence on scholars and practitioners working in a variety of fields, from literary studies to psychology and social work. Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma revolves around the idea that traumatic experiences are fundamentally unrepresentable and escape language. She argues that this is because trauma involves a rupture in the normal process of meaning-making and communication, leading to a state of overwhelming shock and confusion that is difficult to articulate. According to Caruth, the experience of trauma can only be approached indirectly, through the use of metaphor, allegory, and other literary devices that convey the fragmented, non-linear

nature of traumatic memories. Caruth's work also emphasises the role of narrative in the process of healing from trauma. She suggests that by reconstructing their experiences in the form of a coherent story, survivors of trauma can regain a sense of agency and control over their lives. Moreover, the act of sharing their stories with others can serve as a form of testimony and bear witness to the truth of their experiences. Caruth's theory of trauma has had a profound impact on the fields of literary and cultural studies, as well as on psychology, psychoanalysis, and related disciplines. Her insights into the nature of trauma and its effects on individual identity have opened up new avenues of inquiry and shed light on the complex relationship between personal experience, history, and collective memory.

The project uses Caruth's theory of trauma to analyse the novel *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins. By exploring the ways in which language is used to represent trauma in the novel, the thesis focuses on the underlying themes of trauma, memory, and identity that emerge from the text. The study examines how the complex psychological and emotional states of the main character are shaped by her traumatic experiences, and how these experiences impact her identity and behaviour. By drawing on Caruth's theory of trauma, the analysis offers a deeper understanding of the effects of trauma on individual identity and the role of language and narrative in the process of healing. *The Girl on the Train* is a complex psychological thriller that weaves together the stories of three women, each of whom is struggling to come to terms with past trauma and current challenges. The novel is set in the UK and is told from the perspective of three women - Rachel, Megan, and Anna. Rachel Watson is the main protagonist of the novel, a woman who

struggles with alcoholism and depression. Rachel's life is in shambles, and she spends her days riding the train, which has become a solace for her. She spends her time observing the lives of the people in the houses along the tracks, and she becomes fixated on a particular couple, Scott and Megan. Megan is a young woman who is struggling to come to terms with the sudden and tragic loss of her husband, and is trying to find meaning in her life. Anna, on the other hand, is a single mother, who is trying to move on from a traumatic past, which involved an abusive ex-husband. All three women have experienced trauma in their lives and are struggling to cope with it. The novel explores the effects of trauma on the lives of the characters, including the physical, mental, and emotional impact it has on them. For Rachel, her trauma is the root cause of her addiction and depression, and she is struggling to come to terms with the end of her marriage and the loss of her job. Her past trauma is gradually revealed throughout the novel, including a failed pregnancy and a history of infidelity, which has left her feeling guilty and ashamed. Megan's trauma is tied to the sudden death of her husband, a loss that she is unable to process or move on from. Her pain is palpable, and she struggles with feelings of grief and despair, turning to drugs and affairs to cope with her pain. Anna, the third woman, has suffered from the trauma of an abusive marriage, which has left her feeling powerless and afraid. She is struggling to move on from her past, but finds solace in her new relationship with Scott, a man who understands her pain and helps her find a way forward. As the novel progresses, the characters' stories become increasingly intertwined, leading to a thrilling and suspenseful climax. Through the course of the story, the characters find ways to cope with their

past traumas and learn to accept their present reality. They each find their own way to move forward, whether it's through seeking help, confronting their pain, or building new relationships. *The Girl on the Train* is a masterfully crafted novel that delves into the complex nature of trauma and its effects on individuals. Through the characters' stories, Paula Hawkins highlights the different ways trauma can manifest itself, and the various coping mechanisms that people use to deal with it. The novel provides a compelling exploration of the human psyche and the ways in which people can heal and move forward, despite the obstacles that they face. The analysis will primarily focus on the experiences of the main characters, Rachel and Megan, and how their experiences of trauma shape their identities and relationships. The thesis will also examine the ways in which language and narrative are used by the characters as tools for coping with trauma and the possibility of healing. The thesis seeks to contribute to the understanding of the effects of trauma on individual identity and the ways in which language and narrative can be used for healing.

The thesis is divided into five chapters, each with its own focus. Chapter 1 examines the concept of trauma as being inherently unrepresentable and how it is depicted in literature. It analyzes how the main character's experiences of trauma are portrayed in the novel and how language fails to capture the depth of her emotional and psychological pain. Chapter 2 delves deeper into the effects of trauma on individual identity and how language and narrative can shape or reconstruct it. The chapter analyzes how the central character's experiences of trauma have affected her sense of self and her relationships with others. It also explores the use of language and narrative in

the novel to convey the complexity of trauma and its effects on identity. In the final chapter, Chapter 3, the thesis explores the possibility of healing from trauma in *The Girl on the Train*. It analyzes how Rachel's journey towards healing is depicted in the novel and how language and narrative play a role in this process. The limitations of language and narrative in representing the healing process are also examined, and alternative modes of expression that can aid in the process of healing are explored. The conclusion sums up the findings of the study.

Chapter 1

Unraveling the Complexity of Trauma: an Exploration of Language and Narrative in *The Girl On the Train*.

In his article “Trauma Escapes Language, But So Does Life”, C Fred Alfred quotes Bessel van der Kolk saying

Literal nature of the traumatic flashback or memory means that it belongs to a system of traumatic memory different from that of ordinary memory and as such is cut off or dissociated from ordinary recollection, symbolization, and meaning. (qtd. in Alfred)

The theory of trauma struggles with language because traumatic experiences are so overwhelming and sudden that they cannot be expressed in words. This is why trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth are interested in neuroscience and the work of Bessel van der Kolk. Van der Kolk argues that traumatic experiences cannot be put into words because they are so intense. However, it is important to note that language is always limited in its ability to fully express experience, not just for those who have experienced trauma, but for everyone. Therefore, trauma is not separate from ordinary experience, but rather a more extreme version of the limitations of language. While trauma is uniquely painful, the way it affects language is not unique and is experienced by all who use language. (Alfred)

In 1996, the field of literary criticism saw an increase in the study of trauma following the publication of Cathy Caruth's book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Caruth developed a poststructuralist psychoanalytic approach that views trauma as an event that cannot be fully represented or understood. This perspective suggests that trauma represents a challenge to the unconscious, revealing the contradictions inherent in both language and experience. Through her deconstructive approach, Caruth emphasises the inherent linguistic uncertainty, vague references, and limitations in defining trauma as a recurring sense of absence that restricts knowledge of the extreme experience and limits linguistic value to simple expressions of reference. This influential model of trauma emphasizes the profound harm caused by external sources such as individual perpetrators or collective social practices, and its neurobiological features that defy representation and cause dissociation. As a result, this approach has been widely adopted by literary critics who are not poststructuralists. (Balaev)

In *The Girl on the Train*, Rachel and Megan's experiences of trauma are central to the narrative, as their traumatic events have lasting effects on their individual identities. The novel portrays these traumas through various instances, such as Rachel's history of alcoholism and her failed marriage, and Megan's violent assault and abduction

"I can't remember. I don't remember what happened. I don't remember anything. I don't remember" (340)

"The memories, the sense of him, start to slip away. They slide back down into the blackness, unreachable" (49).

"It feels like there's a blank space there, an empty hole, something that should

be there and isn't" (84).

"I feel like I'm drowning. I'm searching for something to hold on to, something to pull me up to the surface, but everything keeps slipping through my fingers" (56).

"I try to remember, but it's like trying to grasp at something in the dark. I can feel it there, just out of reach, but I can't quite get a hold of it" (30).

These are instances from the novel in which traumatic events of Megan and Rachel is shown. Rachel is unable to remember what happened, indicating a gap in her memory that is likely related to the trauma she has experienced. This gap creates a sense of confusion and uncertainty for Rachel, as she struggles to understand what has happened to her and how she got to this point. The slipping away of memories, which highlights the impermanence and fragility of memory in the aftermath of trauma. This sense of loss contributes to the feeling of emptiness and disconnection that Rachel experiences, as she tries to hold onto something that is slipping away from her. The quotes use the metaphor of drowning to describe Rachel's struggle to cope with the trauma she has experienced. The blank space represents a void left by the missing memories, creating a sense of incompleteness and the feeling that something important is missing. These quotes highlight the complex and often unrepresentable nature of trauma and its profound impact on memory and one's sense of self. Through the analysis of the experiences of Rachel and Megan, the thesis provides a deeper understanding of how trauma shapes identity and relationships, and how language and narrative can be used as tools for coping and healing. It depicts a sense of loss and trauma experienced by the character. The memories of a person she used to know are

slipping away, becoming unreachable and fading into the blackness of her mind. This suggests that the character is struggling to cope with a traumatic experience and is finding it difficult to hold onto the memories associated with it. The trauma here could be related to the character's attempt to forget a past event that caused her pain, or it could be related to a larger experience of trauma that she is trying to suppress. This is a common response to trauma - the mind can become overwhelmed by painful memories and attempt to push them away in order to cope with the emotional distress they cause. This passage highlights the way trauma can impact memory and the way that individuals process and remember their experiences. It suggests that the character is struggling to cope with a traumatic event and is finding it difficult to maintain a connection to her memories. This could be a symptom of trauma, as traumatic experiences can leave a void or a sense of incompleteness in a person's life. It may also suggest a sense of disconnection or detachment from one's own emotions or memories. The speaker expresses feelings of overwhelming despair and helplessness, comparing the experience to drowning. The metaphor suggests that the trauma is so intense and all-encompassing that it feels impossible to escape from it. The speaker is desperately searching for something to cling onto, but everything seems out of reach, adding to their sense of hopelessness. The quote highlights the profound impact that trauma can have on an individual's emotional and psychological well-being, leading to feelings of powerlessness and isolation. The character is struggling to remember something, but is having difficulty doing so. This could be an indication of trauma, as traumatic experiences can often result in fragmented or repressed memories. Rachel's inability to

remember what happened creates confusion and uncertainty for her, as she struggles to understand what has happened to her and how she got to this point. The slipping away of memories contributes to the feeling of emptiness and disconnection that Rachel experiences, as she tries to hold onto something that is slipping away from her. The frustration of trying to remember and the sense of being unable to grasp at something that is just out of reach reinforces the notion that trauma can leave lasting impacts on memory and one's ability to make sense of what has happened. These quotes demonstrate the complex and often unrepresentable nature of trauma and highlight the profound impact it can have on memory and one's sense of self. Rachel's trauma is a central theme in *The Girl on the Train*, and it has a significant impact on her identity and relationships. She has experienced several traumatic events in her life, including the breakdown of her marriage, her infertility, and her struggles with alcoholism, which have left her feeling worthless and powerless. Her trauma manifests itself in her blackouts, during which she loses all memory of her actions and becomes a completely different person. Rachel's sense of identity is also fractured due to her trauma, and she feels like there are two versions of herself: the sober, analytical Rachel who wants to do good, and the drunk Rachel who is self-destructive and violent. Her trauma has eroded her sense of self-worth, and she believes that her inability to have children and her divorce make her "worthless". Her low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness drive much of her behaviour throughout the book. Rachel's trauma affects her relationships with others, and she is consumed with guilt, self-doubt, and jealousy. Her obsession with her ex-husband Tom and his new wife Anna, as well as her voyeuristic tendencies

towards Megan and Scott, are all driven by her trauma. She desires to be useful and to have a purpose in life to justify her existence and to feel like she has some worth.

Despite her struggles, Rachel is a determined and analytical person, and she is able to use these qualities to uncover the truth about Megan's disappearance. Through her investigation, Rachel is able to confront her trauma, find a sense of purpose in her life, and begin to heal from her past. Megan, the main character, experiences traumatic events that greatly impact her psyche. The first incident that caused Megan's trauma was the death of her older brother, Ben, who was killed in a motor vehicle accident. Megan is deeply affected by her brother's death and feels that it is the trigger for everything that has happened in her life. She even states, "I miss him every day. More than anyone, I think. He's the big hole in my life, in the middle of my soul. Or maybe he was just the beginning of it" (23). Megan's brother was the only one in her family who gave her attention and protection, especially from men. She deeply mourns the loss of her brother and the fact that he will not be there to protect her anymore. The trauma from her brother's death causes Megan to have a stress disorder and develop symptoms of PTSD. She is plagued by the memory of the tragic accident and constantly thinks about it. In addition to her brother's death, the death of Megan's baby due to her own carelessness is another traumatic event experienced by Megan. It presents the possibility of a serious threat to one's loved ones, in this case, the death of her own child. Her carelessness causes her great distress and makes her feel guilty for not being able to protect her baby. Megan often remembers the event, as she states

I close my eyes, and it doesn't take me long to get back here, back to the bathroom. It's weird, because I've spent so long trying to forget that day, but it's always there, at the back of my mind. A constant nagging sensation that I can never shake off. (161)

These traumatic events have greatly impacted Megan's psyche, causing her to develop symptoms of PTSD and become isolated and lonely. Her wildness, which had been exacerbated by the death of her brother, led her to run away from home, get arrested twice, and break her relationship with her family. The traumatic experiences of Megan in *The Girl on the Train* greatly impact her psyche and cause her to develop symptoms of PTSD. Her brother's death and the death of her baby due to her own carelessness have caused her to become isolated and lonely. Megan's story illustrates the long-lasting and debilitating effects of trauma on a person's mental health and well-being.

Megan's obsession with her psychiatrist, Kamal Abdic, is a clear sign of a transference phenomenon in psychotherapy. Transference occurs when a patient's feelings or emotions towards one person, such as a therapist, are displaced onto another person. In this case, Megan is projecting her desires onto Dr. Abdic, who is a figure of authority and trust in her life. "If I could, I would come here every day, just for an hour or two. I'd just sit here and drink wine, feel his hand brush against mine...He lets me" (161). Megan's desire to be close to Dr. Abdic is not romantic, but rather represents a longing for a kind of intimacy and emotional connection that she is not getting in her personal life. She imagines a relationship with him where she feels heard and seen, which is something she is struggling to find in her marriage and in her interactions with others. Megan is having an affair with Tom, and they are

meeting in a room at the Swan. The description of the room being dark and the air being close with the smell of them adds to the illicit nature of their affair. The mention of the room being "under the eaves" also adds to the secrecy and hidden nature of their meeting. "The room is dark, the air close, sweet with the smell of us. We're at the Swan again, in the room under the eaves." (75). This situation is significant because it reveals one of the main plot points of the novel, which is the affair between Megan and Tom. This affair has significant consequences for all the characters involved, and its revelation leads to the unraveling of many of the novel's mysteries. This situation highlights the themes of infidelity, betrayal, and secrecy that run throughout the novel. Megan's struggles highlight the importance of mental health care and support in helping individuals cope with and overcome their trauma. Megan's character serves as a cautionary tale of the devastating effects of trauma and the importance of seeking help and support to cope with its lasting impact. Cathy Caruth argues that trauma is often unrepresentable and difficult to put into words, as evidenced by Rachel's fragmented memories of her past and present experiences. Megan, another character in the book, is unable to articulate her feelings about her traumatic past. The structure of the novel itself reflects the unrepresentable nature of trauma, as it is told from multiple perspectives and jumps back and forth in time, creating a fragmented and disorienting narrative that mirrors the fragmented nature of trauma.

Throughout the book, the characters retreat into silence when confronted with traumatic experiences. They struggle to find the right words to express their feelings and often choose to remain silent rather than risk saying the wrong

thing. The characters in the book also experience physical symptoms of trauma, such as headaches, insomnia, and anxiety. These symptoms are difficult to articulate and resist language, further emphasising the unrepresentable nature of trauma.

Language and narrative play an essential role in healing from trauma. Trauma can be an overwhelming experience that can often be difficult to articulate and express. The process of finding the right words to describe what happened can be a challenging and painful experience. However, by giving voice to trauma through language, survivors can begin to make sense of their experiences, connect with others who have experienced similar trauma, and begin the journey of healing. Narrative is also critical to healing from trauma as it provides a structure for organizing and making sense of the traumatic experience. Through storytelling, survivors can create a cohesive and meaningful account of their trauma that can help them to integrate their experience into their sense of self and develop a new narrative that includes growth, resilience, and recovery. Moreover, language and narrative can provide a sense of control over the traumatic experience. Survivors can use language to name their experiences, reclaim their agency, and challenge the powerlessness they may feel after experiencing trauma. By sharing their stories and experiences, survivors can also help to educate others and raise awareness about the impact of trauma on individuals and communities. So in general, language and narrative are essential components of healing from trauma, as they provide a framework for understanding, making sense of, and integrating the traumatic experience into one's life

story. Rachel and Megan use language and narrative to cope with their trauma in different ways in the novel *The Girl on the Train*. Rachel, for instance, engages in a form of storytelling and imagination as a coping mechanism.

After her divorce and

her subsequent descent into alcoholism, Rachel starts riding the train and creates a fantasy life for a couple she sees every day, which she calls Jess and Jason. She imagines their perfect life together and uses this fantasy to escape from her own problems. This imagination allows her to create a narrative that she can control and gives her a sense of agency, even if it is only in her mind.

On the other hand, Megan uses language and narrative in a more literal sense.

She keeps a journal where she writes about her past experiences, including

her traumatic event. She also sees a therapist, with whom she talks through

her experiences and feelings. Through writing and speaking, Megan tries to

make sense of her trauma and gain some control over it. Both Rachel and

Megan's coping mechanisms involve the use of language and narrative.

Rachel's imagination allows her to create a positive narrative that she can

escape into, while Megan's journal and therapy sessions allow her to confront

her trauma and create a new narrative that she can live with.

Chapter 2

The Aftermath of Trauma:Reconstructing Identity in *The Girl on the Train*.

In the novel *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins, trauma is a central theme that affects the lives of the three main female characters, Rachel, Megan, and Anna. In this analysis, the focus will be on Rachel and Megan's experiences of trauma and how it shapes their identities, behaviors, and relationships with others throughout the story. Both characters have experienced significant traumas in their lives, which have left them feeling broken, lost, and struggling to cope. Through examining their experiences, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex and lasting impact of trauma on individuals, and how it can manifest in different ways. In the book *The Girl on the Train*, the main character Rachel is portrayed as a troubled and traumatised individual. Her life has been riddled with traumatic events that have left her emotionally and psychologically scarred. Throughout the book, the author highlights various instances where Rachel has faced traumatic experiences.

"When I think of him now, I remember the man he was before he met Megan. The man I fell in love with. The man who was kind and gentle and funny. The man who loved me. But that man is gone, and in his place is a monster"(12) "I had no idea what had happened to me, but I knew it was bad. I felt the blood running down my face, and I couldn't see out of my left eye. I knew I

"I close my eyes and let the darkness grow and spread until it morphs from a

feeling of sadness into something worse: a memory, a flashback" (16)

"A familiar ache fills my chest. I have felt this way before. On a larger scale, to a more intense degree, of course, but I remember the quality of the pain. You don't forget it" (18).

"I can't remember what I was watching, but at some point I must have felt lonely, or happy, or something, because I wanted to talk to someone" (75).

"I sometimes think I must have been a very happy person before. I have moments when I feel like I can't remember what that was like" (50).

"Sometimes I look at my own reflection and wonder who is looking back at me" (89).

"I don't know how to move on from this, how to let go of the past and start living again" (130).

These are some of the instances from the novel which highlights the effects of trauma on individual identity and role of language and narrative in the novel. Rachel's emotional trauma caused by her failed marriage and the pain of seeing her ex-husband with another woman is depicted here. Her desperation and despair are palpable in this passage. It is about Rachel's ex-husband Tom and the trauma of being in a relationship with someone who has changed for the worse. The juxtaposition of the man she fell in love with and the monster he has become shows the emotional turmoil Rachel is going through. It is about a traumatic event that happens to Rachel herself. It shows the fear and helplessness she feels, as well as the physical pain and trauma she experiences. Rachel Watson, the main character in *The Girl on the Train*, suffers from several psychological disorders including Acute Stress Disorder (ASD), alcoholism, depression, and Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID).

She experiences flashbacks of traumatic events, such as her divorce and the murder she witnessed from the train, and uses alcohol to self-medicate, leading to blackouts and memory loss. She also displays symptoms of DID, including the presence of multiple personalities and losing track of time. In this passage Rachel Watson describes a moment when she allows herself to sink into a dark state of mind, and in doing so, is confronted with a traumatic memory. She closes her eyes and lets the sadness she feels grow and spread until it becomes something more intense, something that feels like a flashback. This highlights Rachel's struggle with depression and trauma. She is haunted by past experiences that continue to affect her in the present. The fact that the sadness she feels morphs into a memory suggests that her trauma is not something that she can easily escape or compartmentalise. Instead, it is something that lurks beneath the surface, waiting to be triggered. The language used in this passage also reinforces the intensity of Rachel's emotions. This passage provides insight into Rachel's state of mind and the psychological toll of her trauma. It is a powerful reminder that the effects of trauma can be long-lasting and pervasive, and that even seemingly small triggers can bring back painful memories and emotions. This quote is from the perspective of Rachel Watson, the protagonist of the novel, who is struggling with alcoholism and depression, and is haunted by past trauma. The quote indicates that Rachel is experiencing a familiar sensation of pain, a feeling that she has felt before, but on a larger and more intense scale. The "familiar ache" that fills Rachel's chest suggests that she has experienced similar pain before, possibly from previous traumatic events that have left a lasting impact on her. The fact that she remembers "the quality of the pain"

indicates that this is not a new feeling, but one that she has encountered before. The passages also suggests that the pain that Rachel is feeling is not just physical, but emotional as well. The mention of "a larger scale, to a more intense degree" implies that the pain is overwhelming and difficult to manage. It is a feeling that is deeply ingrained in Rachel's psyche, and one that she cannot forget. These quotes highlights Rachel's ongoing struggles with trauma and the profound impact it has had on her life. It also emphasizes the lasting effects of traumatic experiences and the way they can continue to haunt a person long after the event has occurred. Rachel is reflecting on a traumatic event that occurred in her past, which has left her feeling angry and upset.

Although she doesn't specify what happened, it's clear that it was a significant event that has had a lasting impact on her. Rachel's emotions are intense and visceral - she describes feeling furious, with her nails digging into her palms and tears stinging her eyes. The use of sensory language emphasises the physical and emotional pain that she is experiencing. It's clear that this event is still very raw and painful for her, as she is feeling these strong emotions even while sitting on the train. This highlights the way that traumatic events can continue to affect people long after they occur. Even though Rachel is no longer in the situation that caused her trauma, she is still feeling the effects of it. The intensity of her emotions suggests that she has not fully processed the event or come to terms with its impact on her. It shows how trauma can manifest in intense emotional and physical reactions, and how these reactions can persist over time. It also sets up Rachel as a character who is struggling to cope with the effects of her trauma and suggests that this will be an important

|theme throughout the novel. Rachel is reflecting on her current state of mind and her struggle with depression. She recognizes that there was a time in her life when she was happy, but that memory feels distant and inaccessible to her now. Rachel's statement highlights the way that depression can make it difficult to remember positive experiences or emotions. It also suggests that her current state of mind is vastly different from her previous experiences of happiness, implying that she has undergone some traumatic experiences or events that have had a significant impact on her mental health. The quotes also suggests that Rachel is struggling with a sense of loss or longing for a time when she was happier. Rachel's loneliness is a recurring theme throughout the novel, as she has lost her job and her husband, and is now living alone and struggling with alcoholism and depression. She has become fixated on the lives of the people she sees on the train, imagining their perfect relationships and happy lives, which only serve to emphasize her own isolation and despair. The statement "Sometimes I look at my own reflection and wonder who is looking back at me"(89). suggests a sense of detachment or dissociation from oneself. It implies a feeling of uncertainty or confusion about one's own identity. It's possible that the person making this statement is experiencing some sort of identity crisis, where they are questioning their own sense of self and trying to understand who they really are. This could be due to a number of factors, such as a major life change or a personal struggle that has caused them to reevaluate their beliefs and values. The statement suggests a certain level of introspection and self-awareness. It also implies a desire to understand oneself on a deeper level, which can be a positive step towards personal growth and self-discovery. However, it's important for

individuals experiencing these kinds of feelings to seek out support and guidance, whether through therapy, self-reflection, or other means, to help them navigate their way through this process. The speaker is expressing their struggle with letting go of the past and moving on. They are likely dealing with some form of trauma or significant event that has left a lasting impact on them. The speaker's words convey a sense of feeling lost and stuck, as though they are unable to move forward in their life. They may be struggling to find meaning or purpose in their current situation and are feeling overwhelmed by the weight of their past experiences. This passage highlights the difficulty of letting go of the past and finding a way to move forward. It speaks to the universal struggle of coming to terms with trauma and finding a way to live a fulfilling life despite the pain and challenges that come with it. Rachel's trauma is particularly evident in her blackouts, which occur when she drinks to excess. During these blackouts, Rachel loses all memory of her actions, and she becomes a completely different person. She is often violent and destructive, and she has no control over her behavior. Rachel's blackouts are a manifestation of her trauma, as they allow her to escape from the pain and the shame of her past. Rachel's trauma also affects her relationships with others. She is consumed with guilt and self-doubt, and she struggles to connect with other people. She is deeply jealous of her ex-husband Tom's new wife, Anna, and she spends a lot of time obsessing over their relationship. Rachel's jealousy is a result of her feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness, and it is a manifestation of her trauma. Despite her struggles, Rachel is a determined and analytical person, and she is able to use these qualities to uncover the truth about Megan's disappearance. Through her

investigation, Rachel is able to confront her trauma and to find a sense of purpose in her life. She is finally able to let go of her guilt and to begin to heal from her past. (Shmoop)

The book *The Girl on the Train* portrays Rachel as a character who has faced multiple traumatic events that have left her emotionally and psychologically scarred. Through various instances in the book, the author highlights Rachel's struggles with failed relationships, empathy for others, and personal trauma. These instances provide a deeper understanding of Rachel's character and the impact of trauma on her life. Megan is a complex character who struggles with a range of traumas that have affected her throughout her life. The most significant trauma she has experienced is the death of her daughter, Libby, which occurred when she fell asleep in the bathtub while caring for her. This tragic event has left Megan with a profound sense of guilt and shame that haunts her throughout the book. In addition to her guilt over Libby's death, Megan has also experienced significant loss and abandonment in her life. Her first love, Mac, left her without any explanation, and her brother Ben died in an accident when they were teenagers. These experiences have left Megan with a deep sense of loneliness and a fear of being abandoned by those she cares about. Megan's trauma has also led her to engage in destructive behaviors, such as cheating on her husband and getting pregnant with another man's baby. These behaviors are a manifestation of her need for control and her desire to feel something other than the pain and emptiness she carries inside. Megan admits that having an affair makes her feel in control and powerful, something she lacks in her marriage with Scott. Megan's trauma is also

reflected in her struggle with identity and self-worth. Her search for identity is complicated by her past experiences of trauma, which leave her feeling powerless and disconnected from herself and those around her. It's also worth noting that Megan's trauma is compounded by the fact that she lives in a society that stigmatizes mental health issues and discourages people from seeking help. Megan's therapy sessions with Kamal are a lifeline for her, providing her with a safe space to process her emotions and experiences. However, she is ashamed of her need for therapy and fears being labeled as crazy or weak. Megan's experiences of trauma in *The Girl on the Train* is a complex and multi-layered story about Megan's struggle with guilt, loss, abandonment, and self-worth. Her trauma leads to her downfall and serves as a reminder of the impact of trauma and the importance of seeking help and support when needed. Trauma can manifest in a variety of ways and its effects can be felt long after the initial event. It is important to understand how trauma can influence one's thoughts, behaviors, and emotions in order to develop effective interventions and support systems. Through an analysis of existing research and personal narratives, the thesis explores the ways in which trauma can shape an individual's actions. Megan's experiences of trauma have a significant impact on her actions and relationships in *The Girl on the Train*. These traumatic events shape her character and contribute to her feelings of guilt, depression, and anxiety. Megan's experiences of trauma also affect her ability to maintain stable relationships, and her actions often lead to harmful consequences for herself and those around her. One of the most significant traumas Megan experiences is the loss of her brother, Ben. This event has a profound impact on Megan's emotional state, and she finds

it challenging to move past her brother's death. Megan is haunted by the memories of Ben, and she is unable to escape the feeling that something is missing from her life. This unresolved trauma causes Megan to struggle with her emotions and makes her feel alone, leading her to seek comfort in destructive behaviors, such as drinking and engaging in affairs with her therapist. Megan's negligence that led to the death of her baby is another traumatic event that has a lasting impact on her. The guilt Megan feels over the death of her child overwhelms her, and she finds it challenging to cope with her emotions. This experience causes her to feel isolated and disconnected from the people around her, and she becomes increasingly reliant on drugs and alcohol to numb her pain. Megan's experiences of trauma have a profound impact on her life and relationships, leading to self-destructive behaviors, damaged relationships, and a pervasive feeling of isolation and loneliness. Her relationship with her husband, Scott, is also affected by her traumatic experiences, as she is unable to fully connect with Scott and her past traumas prevent her from being fully present in their marriage. Megan's relationship with her therapist, Kamal, is also influenced by her experiences of trauma, as her need for comfort and emotional support leads to an inappropriate relationship with Kamal, which jeopardizes his career and leaves Megan feeling even more alone and unsupported. The novel serves as a reminder of the devastating effects of trauma and the importance of seeking help and support to move forward. The traumatic experience of not being able to conceive a child had a significant impact on Rachel's behavior and relationships. Rachel's trauma also affected her ability to trust and form new relationships. She struggles to connect with others and

often feels isolated and alone. Her past trauma has left her with a deep sense of shame and self-blame, making it difficult for her to open up and be vulnerable with others.

Chapter 3

The Possibility of Healing from Trauma in *The Girl on the Train*

The novel portrays the possibility of healing from trauma through the characters' actions and experiences. Rachel's decision to stop drinking and attend therapy shows that recovery is possible with the right resources and support. This is exemplified when Rachel reflects on her therapy sessions, saying, "I started to feel a bit better, a bit lighter. Not happy, but... less consumed" (231). In addition to Rachel's progress, Anna's decision to stand up to Tom is a significant step in her recovery from emotional abuse. She confronts him, saying, "I'm done with being afraid of you, Tom. I'm done with your lies and your manipulations" (374). This moment highlights the importance of empowerment and agency in the recovery process. Megan's journal also shows the possibility of healing from trauma. This demonstrates the power of self-reflection and a commitment to personal growth. The novel suggests that healing from trauma involves facing the truth about oneself and one's past. Rachel reflects on her own actions. This self-awareness is a crucial step towards recovery. It portrays the possibility of healing from trauma as a difficult but achievable process. Through the characters' experiences and actions, it shows that recovery is possible with the right resources, support, and a willingness to face one's past. Various instances in the novel show us how the characters move towards healing and recovery. Rachel, the

protagonist, starts attending therapy to deal with her alcoholism and trauma from her failed marriage. She also confronts the truth about her past and takes responsibility for her actions, which helps her move towards self-forgiveness and healing. Anna, Rachel's ex-husband's new wife, decides to take a break from her marriage and focus on her own needs and desires. She also seeks therapy to work on her own issues and improve her mental health. Tom, Rachel's ex-husband, takes responsibility for his past mistakes and tries to make amends with Rachel. He also seeks therapy to work on his own issues and become a better partner to Anna. Megan, the missing woman whose disappearance Rachel becomes entangled in, starts therapy to work through her trauma and past mistakes. She also begins to reconnect with her family and build a support system. Overall, the characters in the book demonstrate the importance of seeking help and taking responsibility for one's actions in order to move towards healing and recovery. Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma suggests that traumatic experiences are difficult to process and communicate because they are fundamentally disruptive to our sense of time and language. In this sense, language and narrative can be both a tool and a limitation in the process of healing from trauma. On one hand, language and narrative can help us to articulate and process our experiences, allowing us to make sense of our trauma and find a path towards recovery. By putting our experiences into words, we can create a sense of coherence and continuity, which can help to reestablish a sense of order and control in our lives. However, the use of language and narrative also presents limitations and challenges in the process of healing. Traumatic experiences are often characterized by a rupture in our sense of time, with past events

feeling like they are happening in the present moment. This makes it difficult to use language to create a linear narrative that makes sense of the experience. The use of language and narrative can also be limiting because it is based on the assumption that there is a clear boundary between the subject and the object. Trauma, on the other hand, disrupts this boundary, causing a collapse of the self and the external world. As a result, language and narrative may not fully capture the complexity and depth of the traumatic experience. While language and narrative can be helpful tools in the process of healing from trauma, they also present limitations and challenges. Traumatic experiences are fundamentally disruptive to our sense of time and language, making it difficult to fully articulate and process the experience through language and narrative alone.

Conclusion

The thesis has explored the effects of trauma on individual identity and the role of language and narrative in the process of healing, using *The Girl on the Train* as a case study and Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma as a framework.

The analysis has demonstrated that trauma can have a profound and lasting effect on an individual's psyche, as illustrated by the unrepresentable nature of trauma depicted in the novel. The manifestations of trauma, including a feeling of being stuck in time, an inability to move on from the past, and a sense of detachment from oneself, were examined in relation to the characters in the novel, particularly Rachel Watson. The thesis has also highlighted the importance of understanding trauma as a complex and multifaceted experience that can have long-lasting effects on an individual's identity and behavior. The role of language and narrative in shaping and processing traumatic experiences was emphasized, with storytelling and communication being identified as powerful tools in the process of healing. Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma was shown to be useful in understanding the challenges that individuals face when trying to articulate and process traumatic experiences through language and narrative. While language and narrative can be helpful tools in the process of healing, they also present limitations and challenges due to the fundamentally disruptive nature of trauma. Overall, the analysis has provided compelling evidence for the

unrepresentable nature of trauma and the importance of acknowledging this in the process of healing. Through an examination of *The Girl on the Train* and Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma, this thesis has contributed to a deeper understanding of the effects of trauma on individuals and the role of language and narrative in the process of healing.

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