

Trauma, Memory, and Fragmented Subjectivity in Julian Barnes's The Only Story

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ABSTRACT

The Only Story (2018) by Julian Barnes is often perceived as a love, aging, and regrets novel. Nevertheless, these interpretations do not give much attention to the fact that the text continuously appeals to the psychological trauma. This paper will examine how The Only Story uses Cathy Caruth theory on trauma to argue that the love itself is an unassimilated experience that can only be perceived late in life through memory, repetition and fragmentation of the narrative. The paper analyses the manifestation of trauma in delayed understanding, linguistic confines, obsessive redundancy, breached timeliness, and fragmented narrative speech. The paper shows that Barnes depicts love not as a redemptive, transformative experience through a close textual analysis but as a psychic break that is forever disorienting the identity. The novel broadens the boundaries of the trauma fiction genre and disrupts racial narratives of recovery and healing by anticipating emotional trauma created by intimate relationships, instead of premises of a cataclysmic event. The paper is relevant to the current literature of trauma studies and Barnes scholarship because it places The Only Story in the context of unresolved and non-therapeutic trauma...

Keywords: Trauma theory, Cathy Caruth, Julian Barnes, Memory, Fragmentation of the narrative, Love and trauma, Subjectivity

1. INTRODUCTION:

In the last thirty years, the theory of trauma has radically altered the discipline of literary studies by shifting the critical focus not on the depiction of historical events per se but on the psychic residual of experience. Trauma theory has evolved over the last thirty years as part of an interdisciplinary interaction between psychoanalysis, history, and cultural studies, first in reaction to accounts of extreme collective violence, war, genocide, colonial and mass displacement. The earlier scholars look up to Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dominick LaCapra to note that trauma is not necessarily characterized by the violence of an experience but by the inability of the subject to fully comprehend and assimilate the experience during its occurrence. In this respect, trauma breaks the linear time, tears the memory and does not allow forming a story. The trauma studies have experienced a considerable growth in recent years. The application of trauma theory to a story of personal pain, emotional deprivation and love has become a growing area of scholarship, where scholars note that traumas can also occur because of a socially acceptable or culturally idealized experience. This change is evidence of the increased consciousness that trauma is not determined by the magnitude or degree of an occurrence or its visibility but the effect it has on the psyche, that is, its ability to overwhelm the subject with his or her capacity to process experience into consciousness. The long-term

dependency, emotional abandonment, and affective entanglement may end up causing trauma that is as long-lasting and destabilizing as that caused by overt violence. The ability of literature to document subjective fragmentation, temporal disruption and linguistic failure, particularly has been found to be highly apt in documenting such trauma.

The Only Story (2018) by Julian Barnes takes an important place in this extended landscape of trauma narration. On the surface, the novel tells the story of a young love affair between a nineteen-year-old man, Paul Roberts and a married woman, Susan Macleod who is close to thirty years older than Paul Roberts. The association is socially deviant, emotionally charged and is set within the context of suburban English living. Importantly, but most importantly, it is not characterized by explicit physical violence, immediate disaster, or traumas that can be identified historically. It is on this basis that the novel has frequently been critically discussed in the context of romantic idealism, moral responsibility, memory, aging and regret. The usual fixation of Barnes on the unreliability of memory and the unethical ambiguity of individual decision-making has also promoted the inclinations to read the novel as belonging to traditions of reflective realism, not as a trauma novel. Although such understandings have somewhat useful information, they tend to underrate the enduring interest of the novel in psychological trauma. In

the Only Story, disappointment and emotional pain are not simply described; the experience described is the one whose results are manifested later, obsessively and irreversibly over time. Paul does not only experience suffering during the period of the relationship itself but, it comes about through memory, repetition, and retrospective narration. According to the novel, love, especially when mythologized as total and ethically redeeming, may indeed be an experience of trauma, and may leave behind subjectivity irreparable to a narrative.

In this paper, the thesis is that The Only Story has to be read as a trauma narrative organized through belatedness, unspeakability, repetition, fragmented subjectivity. Basing her study predominantly on the influential trauma theory by Cathy Caruth, the aspect of the study conceptualizes the love that Paul has to Susan as an unclaimed experience, or the event that is experienced but not fully understood at the time of the occurrence and reemerges subsequently in intrusive and disruptive forms. However, the delay in comprehension is the definition of trauma, not necessarily the timeliness of pain, but what Caruth calls experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to know fully, and returns as memory, not through direct recall. This structure is reflected in the narration of Paul as it is only after emotional damage has changed his identity that he comes to understand it. In this context, love in The Only Story is not only disappointing or painful, it is traumatic because of being discovered too late, when the subject has already been changed forever and the psychic effects of love have been implemented. Barnes breaks down romantic plots which portray love as a growth or self-actualization, but rather it is a blow which the subject is unable to absorb. Formal experimentation of the novel, especially the change in the narrative voice between the first and the second and the third person, contributes even more to the effects of the trauma on the memory and identity that imply the dissociation, the split of the self, and the loss of coherent subjectivity.

The following research questions have led to the current research:

What does The Only Story achieve by enshrining love as a traumatic experience, belated and nonetheless traumatic, instead of an instantly recognizable source of misery?

How does trauma take place in narrative unspeakability, silence, and compulsive repetition?

What is the relationship between Barnes narrative structure and the psychic structures of trauma as proposed by Cathy Caruth, especially in terms of the subjectivity and time?

In what ways does the novel disrupt traditional trauma discourses which celebrate recovery, healing and narrative closure?

The answers to these questions have placed The Only Story in the context of the modern trauma fiction, and the theory of trauma has been applied to the sphere of intimate emotional experience. Thus, it is a part of larger discussions about memory and subjectivity and affective suffering in contemporary literature, showing that trauma

does not necessarily come with spectacular violence to make a significant and lasting impression on the self.

2. Literature Review

The theory of trauma has radically changed the critical approach of literature, as it has shifted the focus of criticism away on the historical disasters of the past and to the psychological aftermath of the experience. Another influential theory among the various explanations of trauma is the one presented by Cathy Caruth, which stresses the concepts of belatedness, repetition, and disruption of narrative and claims that a person does not clearly understand trauma when it takes place but it recurs later in intrusive and compulsive forms (Caruth 1996). This has been pivotal in interpreting literature in which the use of memory struggles against linear storytelling and emotional experiences are not resolved. According to Caruth, trauma challenges are also challenged by representations in the sense that they create gaps, silence, and broken time and that narrative itself is a place of psychic conflict (Caruth 1995). Continuing on the work done by Caruth, Dominick LaCapra emphasizes the difference between acting out and working through the trauma in his article that suggests that certain accounts are stuck in an obsessive repetition instead of moving to critical distance and recovery (LaCapra 2001). The model has been especially helpful in the analysis of those texts that are resistant to therapeutic closure. Anne Whitehead also points to the fact that trauma fiction is formally simulating of psychological unsteadiness in terms of fragmented chronology, repetitive forms and a wavering narrative voice and, in literary presentation, form and trauma can in no way be separated (Whitehead 2004). Roger Luckhurst also extends the trauma studies by placing trauma into the context of cultural and emotional framework by arguing that traumatic fracture is experienced by ordinary people, love, loss, and regret, in contemporary fiction (Luckhurst 2008).

Recent theory has applied trauma theory to stories of intimate and interpersonal suffering, in which it is questioned why trauma has to start with intense violence. Laurie Vickroy emphasizes on how intimate emotional experiences may cause psychic harm in the long term, especially when identity and attachment are disorganized (Vickroy 2002). Balaev criticizes universal trauma frameworks and promotes contextualized reading that takes into consideration cumulative and relational trauma instead of one-time trauma (Balaev 2014). The notion of cruel optimism by Lauren Berlant also sheds more light on why the attachments that are destined to deliver are now the sources of long-term harm, a concept which is now being used more frequently when it comes to stories of romantic disappointment (Berlant 2011).

The main points of the criticism towards The Only Story by Julian Barnes have been based on the question of memory, morality and narrative retrospection with most of the critics viewing the novel as a reflection of love and remorse. Nevertheless, new works have started to identify the structural fragmentation and narrative recovery denial of the novel to match the present-day trauma fiction (Wood 2018; Head 2019). As noted by academics, such

narrative perspectives of transformation and destabilization of narrative power by Barnes are indicative of a divided subjectivity influenced by *ex post facto* knowledge (Smith 2021). However, there are still perspectives of sustained trauma-theoretical readings. This work fills that gap by placing The Only Story within the trauma research focus by highlighting how memory, repetition, and unresolved emotional experience form a narrative that is difficult to heal and is pre-emptive of trauma, as a long-term psychic state.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper relies mostly on the theory of trauma as proposed by Cathy Caruth, which views trauma as an experience that is not clearly perceived at the time when it has taken place but is ultimately realized later on through intrusion memory, repetition and narrative interruption. Caruth states that trauma is experienced too early, too sudden to be understood comprehensively (1996, 4), and thus cannot be directly represented with words. Since the traumatic experience is not assimilated, it comes back indirectly as silences, gaps, formal instability, and is known only by its absence of the visible and accessible (Caruth 1996, 8). The only story especially fits this model when the narrative of The Only Story by Julian Barnes is read in retrospect by Paul, whose memory is obsessive enough and insufficiently filled with language to describe emotional pain. Although the paper takes a momentary look at the thoughts of Freud and Dominick LaCapra, the idea of belatedness and unclaimed experience developed by Caruth prevails. The study methodologically is a qualitative, interpretive study utilizing close textual analysis in terms of identifying how trauma is inscribed both thematically and formally via repetition, fragmented temporality, nutritiveness, and dissociation. Instead of approaching trauma as a thematic motif in and of itself, the analysis presupposes the way that the narrative form itself creates psychic disruption.

4. Belated Experience in Case of Trauma.

The re-conceptualization of trauma as carried out by Cathy Caruth is one that completely destabilizes the idea that experience and comprehension are simultaneous. Trauma is characterized not by the severity of an event itself but the temporal discontinuity: Caruth experiences the event even without properly understanding it and comes back later in delayed and intrusive manifestations. According to her, trauma is not completely known and can only be known after it has already gripped its hold, thus, experienced too soon, too unexpectedly (Caruth 1996, 4). This delayed recognition structure is an important one to read The Only Story because it is not love itself that can become destructive but rather an experience, the traumatic effects of which are not fully understood until retrospectively. Paul goes to his love affair with Susan as a young man who is full of vitality because of the certainty and moral idealism. He puts love as an unconditional ethical value, which could be used to justify social violation and individual sacrifice. At the beginning of the story, Paul claims that he had a clear idea about his childhood belief: love was the highest value in the world and when he possessed it he had to follow it wherever it went (Barnes 2018, 11). At this point, love is felt as

something meaningful and dignified, a declaration of independence against tradition. The experience of the moment is little incited to the feeling that the relationship is going to be emotionally devastating.

It is love only through retrospection that we get the traumatic aspect of love. The older narrating Paul repeats on several occasions that the knowledge comes at the wrong time when the damage has already been internalized. The temporal logic of trauma is summarized by his comment that We live our lives in a state of imperfection, we always know too late (Barnes 2018, 14). Meaning does not come with experience but like a late child, it comes subsequently and turns memory into the place of pain instead of resolution. This late realization is echoed throughout the novel when Paul is adamant that young people are structurally unable to have foresight. You see, he says, you do not know what to do when you are young. You believe you do, however, you do not (Barnes 2018, 92). The latter are not words of remorse but signals to the late form of trauma: the subject is doing things blindly and only learns when it is already too late to unwind the actions. Trauma according to Caruth is not in the event but in the manner that the very unassimilated nature of the event comes back to haunt the survivor later (1996, 4).

The fact that Paul manages to survive the relationship is not generating mastery or closure. Rather, the state of surviving turns to be the state of trauma itself. He admits that love has appeared forever in his emotional life, noting that you do not learn how to be happy in love, but how to be hurt (Barnes 2018, 147). This realization occurs far after the relationship is broken, which further supports the notion that trauma does not occur at one moment in time but changes as time passes. Memory makes love a permanent place of loss, guilt and self-blame. Barnes does not want to discuss trauma as the outcome of dramatic disaster. It is not any single violent incident that can be singled out as the root of the suffering of Paul. Rather, the trauma is given by the slow build-up of emotional dependency, moral compromise, and irreversible change. Paul looks back and notes that nothing horrible happened overnight, it was rather the gradual erosion that caused the harm (Barnes 2018, 163). This focus on gradual discovery is consistent with the assertion of Caruth that trauma can be caused by the experiences that flood the psyche, not so much in the form of spectacle, but due to their retrospective influence on the psyche. The Only Story therefore redefines trauma as an intimacy effect as opposed to violence and memory as opposed to event, through Paul retrospectively narrating the story. Love turns traumatizing not due to its failure, but to its outcome that was too late to become an inseparable part of a sense of self. When one reads the novel of Barnes through the lens provided by Caruth, the depiction of trauma can be seen as an unhealing wound, which manifests itself in the memory, continues due to survival, and cannot be resolved with the help of the narrative.

5. Unspeakability and the Frontiers of Language.

Perhaps the most potent addition to the array of contributions of the trauma theory, especially its version

by Cathy Caruth, is its obsession with the inability of language to describe the traumatic experience. It is specifically due to the fact that trauma was not fully absorbed in consciousness when it happened that this type of trauma is difficult to articulate in linguistic form. According to Caruth, trauma cannot be entirely possessed by the subject so it cannot be narrated directly but only observable in the form of gaps, silences, and the indirect language (1996, 58). The Only Story anticipates such opposition to language on thematic as well as formal levels such that narration is turned into an arena of conflict.

Paul acknowledges again and again the inability of language to express emotional truth. His claim that the majority of what is important in our lives occurs in our heads, and words are not fit to do it justice (Barnes 2018, 67) is a metanarrative concession that trauma is unspeakable. Though Paul is a philosopher who recounts his life in a retrospective manner, there is never a time when he cuts to the heart of his emotions and suffering. The novel does not provide the confession or catharsis, but rather presents hesitation, abstraction and analytical distance. Prose that is used by Barnes never has emotional words. Paul never gives visceral or affective accounts of his pain; instead, he conceptualizes it, screening experience using moral inquiry and generalization. He says, as an example, that strong emotion does not make life easier; it is more complicated (Barnes 2018, 74), instead of conceptual revelation being revealed through feelings. Such a stylistic reserve is characteristic of the inability of trauma to be represented. The trauma is there but it is pushed aside in philosophical contemplation instead of it being expressed as emotion.

Markedly, Paul frequently talks about his suffering instead of about it. He admits that emotional harm was not removed, but he could not talk about it directly: "You do not define pain, you go around it, hoping it will speak on its own (Barnes 2018, 121). This circling motion is a characteristic of trauma that Caruth argues is known by its non-presence in the observable and the available (1996, 8). The meaning is not created by description, but by gaps of narrative, the instances of the linguistic failures. Another element of trauma representation in Barnes is silence. He often interrupts his narration with rhetoric questions, qualifications and disclaimers as a signal of the instability of meaning. He says, I have never quite been in a position to say what it was that went wrong (Barnes 2018, 139). This indecision is not a failure of narration but an imitation of the unspeakable nature of trauma. Barnes therefore opposes the curative effect of narrative clarity, letting the word in the novel take the scars of psychic discontinuity. The Only Story is not trying to interpret the trauma into words but is performing the boundaries of words. The novel proves that it is not narration that ensures comprehension but it shows where there is a crack in the meaning. The formal manifestation of traumas by Barnes through prose restraint, emotional empty spaces and philosophical digressions conforms to the statement of Caruth that traumas are registered on what is not said, but what cannot be said.

6. Repetition, Memory, INTRUDER Failed Temporality

In the theoretical model of trauma presented by Caruth, repetition is one of the characteristics of the condition. Trauma comes back not in form of voluntary recollection but in the form of compulsory reenactment and this disrupts the linear time and collapses the lines between the past and the present. According to Caruth, the traumatic experience does not take hold or get fully experienced in the moment but only later on in its repetitive taking of the individual who is going through it (1996, 4). It is based on this very logic of repetition, thematic and formal that The Only Story is built around. The novel informs the reader about its traumatizing format in the first line: This was the only story I would ever have to tell (Barnes 2018, 3). The demand of exclusivity of identity is a symptom of the monopolization of identity by trauma. The whole story of his life is subservient to one emotion experience, preclosing the possibility of other narratives of development, rebirth or diversity. Memory is not a means of knowing but an obsession which takes Paul back to the same loss scene over and over again.

The connection with Susan is repeatedly re-examined by Paul, in order, not to remake it, but to experience it again. He already speaks of this obsession: I have read it over and over not to transform it but because I cannot abandon it alone (Barnes 2018, 112). This repetition is an illustration of the unwillingness of trauma to live in the past. The memory is intrusive, not reflective and imposes what can be termed to be time of trauma whereby the chronological order is halted. Of the trauma time, there are no hierarchies in the past and present. Paul notes that the past does not fade away but waits (Barnes 2018, 158), and it implies that memory is always ready to re-emerge at any given moment. This loss of temporal identity is compatible with the one proposed by Caruth of the repetitive nature of trauma that returns in the form of thoughts, behaviours, or images, and cannot be controlled through narration (1996, 11). Paul also narrates in a manner that constantly switches between then and now, and destabilizes any temporal distance between the traumatic experience.

More importantly, repetition in The Only Story is not bringing insight or resolution. When compared to stories of recovery in which repetition is a process that leads to recovery, Barnes introduces repetition as a sign that trauma persists. Paul confesses that telling the story once again does not make it more obvious; it makes it even heavier (Barnes 2018, 171). Memory is thereby a liability instead of a weapon of control, which imposes the unappropriated position of trauma. The recursive form of literary style in the novel, its repetitive revisit of the same emotional centre, denies the redemptive plot traditionally found in the autobiographical narration. The narrative lacks a forward development to resolution, instead leave-taking is repeated. Thus, The Only Story is a manifestation of a statement made by Caruth that trauma does not get solved by telling and retelling the same story but gets re-enacted and re-enacted constantly. Repetition

is no longer a working through, but an indication of the perpetual grip of trauma on subjectivity.

7. Discontinuous Subjectivity and Discontinuous Form.

Formal experimentation of The Only Story by Barnes has a conclusive role in depicting the effects of trauma on subjectivity. Instead of using thematic exposition, the novel incorporates trauma in the structure of a narrative, especially through the use of changing narrative voice. The shifts between first-person narration to second-person address and then to third-person narration are practiced as a form of dissociation which is brought forward by trauma, and which Cathy Caruth recognizes as at the centre of a traumatic experience. When explaining his experience in the first person in the beginning parts, Paul establishes his feeling of coherence and ownership of experience. This storytelling technique implies closeness of the experiencing self and the narrating self. But the closeness becomes less and less bearable as the story unfolds and trauma continues to build up. The change of the form of narration is the breakthrough to the second person. Paul talks to his younger self and says, You were young. You had figured out what it was like to be in love. You didn't" (Barnes 2018, 96). The address to you indicates a division of subjectivity, whereby lived experience becomes a subject of criticism and not identification.

This detached story is in line with what Caruth states that trauma breaks identity by dividing the experience and the conscious. According to her, trauma creates a temporal phenomenon in the way in which the mind perceives time, self, and the world (Caruth 1996, 7). This break is demonstrated by the use of the second person narration by Paul. He is no longer able to quite be in his former self but he has become a spectator of his former self with the eye of ironic detachment and moral judgment. What has happened is not the trauma, but the fact that he cannot reconcile the person he was with who he has become.

This dissociative effect is enhanced by the subsequent movement to the third-person narration. Paul calls himself he, which means that he dismisses narrative intimacy. Such grammatical change implies that subjectivity has become so divided that it cannot be salvaged in any way and even addressing the self is not enough to feel the divide between the experience and narration. When Paul looks back, he thinks to himself that one day, the story is no longer his (Barnes 2018, 172). The self is turned into an object of narration as opposed to its origin, strengthening the alienating power of trauma. The resulting manipulation of narrative perspective, by Barnes, therefore, does not just signify but actually plays out trauma. Narrative voice is unstable, which corresponds to the identity being unstable and acts out the claim that Caruth provides that trauma interrupts the continuity of the self. The novel does not take a consistent narrative stance, but instead enacts subjectivity as fragmented, tentative, and incomplete. Storytelling is not a process of healing, but a place where the structural impacts of trauma are repeated over and over.

8. Love as Traumatic Encounter

The Only Story presents love as a traumatic encounter which is one of the most radical interventions. Instead of the love being redemptive, transformative, and inherently meaningful, Barnes puts it in play as an experience that places the subject in recess, dependence and irreversible psychic harm. This reorganizes is a critique of the prevailing romantic tropes and is quite consistent with the definition of trauma as an overpowering experience that cannot be assimilated (Caruth). Barnes summarizes this point of view in the extreme statement: Love the more, suffer the more (Barnes 2018, 154). The statement fails to outline suffering as a result of unsuccessful love, but as an inherent state of loving itself. Caruthian perspective on love makes it traumatic not because of its bad ending but because it surpasses the psychic ability of the subject to grasp it and internalize its impact. Love is, much like trauma, too intense a thing that is too premature to be known.

The subsequent thoughts of Paul can be seen as the lasting legacy of this experience. He admits that his emotional life has been forever changed by love with the comment that ever since, everything else seems like an echo (Barnes 2018, 161). This emotional foreclosure is the persistence characteristic of trauma. Love is not an object that can be experienced as among others, it is rather the principle of organization, which orders the further experiences, which have to be experienced and understood. Paul does not talk of love as a lesson that results in emotional maturity. Rather, he acknowledges that love causes some kind of irreparable harm: you do not get over love. You are only taught how to live around the wound" (Barnes 2018, 169). This recognition positively contradicts accounts of emotional growth and healing. Love cannot be integrated into a logical account of the self-formation; it is an unhealing wound that cannot be narrated.

In the view of Caruth, the definition of trauma lies not in the eventuality itself, but in its endless consequences. This is how love works in The Only Story. The relationship is not the only cause that traumatizes Paul, but the fact that he realizes what love has cost him late. What makes trauma permanently persist in time and psychically is that the emotional encounter is still present even after the event. Restructuring the definition of love as a traumatic experience, Barnes broadens the boundaries of the theory of trauma beyond the spectacular violence and historical disaster. The Only Story shows that intimacy, attachment, and emotional dependence can become the sources of trauma, which are traditionally celebrated and not examined. By doing these, the novel makes the readers question the edges of trauma and the silent prices of love as such.

9. Denial of Recovery and Perpetual Acting out.

The Only Story insists on recovery refusing most of the trauma narratives which point to healing, in reconciliation, or narrative closure. Barnes breaks down the comforting idea that time is a curative process to reveal the continuation of emotional trauma throughout the lifespan. Paul clearly rejects the concept of time healing when he says, time does not improve things. It simply makes them different to one another (Barnes 2018, 181). This observation discredits therapeutic narratives

that are using trauma as something that can be surmounted slowly by perseverance or contemplation. According to Caruthian view, trauma is difficult to resolve because it was never encountered in the first place. The lack of healing in the history of Paul is an indication that the trauma is unclaimed. Memory never leads to mastery; on the contrary, it makes a reappearance every time, imposing repetition instead of transformation. Paul admits this stasis by the fact that he admits his own confession that he is not any wiser now, he is simply older (Barnes 2018, 176). Old age is not an eye-opener or closure, but it only prolongs the suffering.

Although Dominick LaCapra differentiates acting out and working through trauma, Paul is clearly stuck in the first. The act of acting out in the case of LaCapra is compulsive repetitions without the critical distance or narrative integration. It is the recurrence of the same emotional focal point, that is the love of Susan, which Paul uses repeatedly, without contributing to the reinterpretation or ethical resolution. Rather, he acknowledges that retelling the story does not make it any looser (Barnes 2018, 170). Repetition is not a therapy process but a demonstration of the continuation of trauma. Barnes goes out of his way to oppose the redemptive curve of autobiographical narration. The narration by Paul does not result in the catharsis or reconciliation with the past. Rather, it supports a spirit of emotional foreclosure. He thinks pessimistically, some of the stories do not end. They simply cease to be narrated (Barnes 2018, 184). This denial of closure highlights the inability of trauma to contain a narrative. The story is not left open because it does not have a resolution but because the experience of trauma does not heal. In refusing recovery, Barnes goes against cultural demands that suffering should be rewarded at the end, in some sense or development. The Only Story does not teach but is an experience to be suffered. Such rejection of therapeutic consolation is congruent with the opinion of Caruth who maintains that the trauma is not masterable by means of narration only. Barnes therefore does not depict trauma as a problem that has to be resolved, but as that psychic reality that continues to contour subjectivity even after the initial experience has ceased to exist.

10. Conclusion

As has been shown in this work, The Only Story by Julian Barnes is a complicated trauma narrative organized

around the themes of belatedness, unspeakability, repetition, and fragmented subjectivity. The paper has largely relied on the theory of trauma as developed by Cathy Caruth and has demonstrated that Barnes embodies not the idea of love as a formative/redemptive experience, but rather an experience that cannot be claimed, the effects of which are only manifested through memory. The suffering is not instant as Paul realizes only when the relationship has permanently changed the emotional life. The novel anticipates the resistance of linguistic trauma by its focus on linguistic failure. The repetition of the inadequacy of language by Paul, when he says that words are not up to the task (Barnes 2018, 67), demonstrates the process of narration as a place of struggle and not mastery. The act of trauma is carried out with silence, abstraction and gaps in the narratives, which supports the argument proposed by Caruth that one can know trauma only indirectly, through its disturbances.

The recursive nature of the novel also places it in the genre of trauma fiction. The Only Story does not allow reflection and closure to be achieved through memory; it forces the repetition of memory. The fact that this is the only story that Paul will ever tell makes it clear that he is referring to the monopolization of identity by trauma and the loss of linear time (Barnes 2018, 3). The past and the present are in a continuous present of suffering emotionally which enslaves the subject in the time of traumas. Trauma produces dissociation by creating a formal experimentation by Barnes, specifically, the change of the first-person narration to the second- and third-person one. Narrative voice breaks as well as subjectivity reflect the traumatic breaking of identity and continuity. Storytelling is not recovering, but an official expression of psychic disruption. Lastly, in refusing recovery and rejecting therapeutic closure, The Only Story opposes mainstream cultural discourses that embrace healing, resilience and redemption. The trauma in the novel by Barnes is not conquered or solved; it is overcome. By making an expansion of the trauma theory to incorporate intimate emotional pain instead of spectacular violence, Barnes redefines the parameters of trauma fiction. In this work, love is a place of exposure, late loss, and permanent psychic discontinuity, an experience which cannot be absorbed, retold, or forgotten.

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