The Many Worlds of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary Perspective

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Abstract

The article presents a multidimensional analysis of trauma. The socio-physiological approach in the first part sets the stage for underlining the role of integrative psychotherapy in addressing traumatic wounds. Drawing from different fields, the study then provides Kazuo Ishiguro's psychoanalytic approach to understanding the relationship between trauma and human existence, with a particular focus on the interplay between memory, identity and chronic emotional disturbances. The study thus explores how fiction can serve as a therapeutic tool, giving voice to characters who either embark on healing journeys or try to conceal their unhealed wounds within self-contained worlds. Through existential parables, therapeutic fiction can delve into the psychological implications of traumas, offering the possibility of acceptance, or even healing, despite the immutable nature of the past. Ultimately, this interdisciplinary analysis aims to deepen one's understanding of trauma's impact on individuals and society while it highlights the potential for healing and growth in real life through the worlds of fiction.

Keywords: *Trauma; memory; interdisciplinarity; psychotherapeutic literature; Kazuo Ishiguro*

Introduction

Trauma constitutes an overwhelming experience that can lead to lasting emotional and cognitive effects. Trauma can disrupt one's sense of safety, stability and well-being, as it results in various psychological and behavioural responses pertaining to one's overall health, social support network and belief systems (Kolk, 2015). The desire to suppress a distressing memory can therefore be seen as a natural response to a traumatic event. Nevertheless, the act of repression exacerbates the emotional wound, hindering its potential for healing. Moreover, the process of repression gives rise to an unconscious bond with the source of pain, whereas engaging in recollection may serve as the sole means to confront and overcome the distress. A viable approach to altering the nature of fear-inducing memories involves reinterpreting them from the vantage point of the present understanding of the traumatic event. When traumatised individuals feel prepared, they initiate the process of reconfiguring their recollection of agonising events, framing them as valuable life lessons learned through hardship. This shift allows them to relinquish dwelling in the past while it empowers them to redefine their traumatic experiences based on subsequent events and life purposes. The fighter mentality could therefore counterbalance most distressing memories while the awareness that life itself represents a priceless gift could temper emotional turmoil.

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In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche examines the will to power as the supreme existential force when it represents the inner strength to pursue life objectives rooted neither in competition nor in domination. Physiologists should therefore reconsider positioning the drive for self-preservation as the primary instinct in beings, as life fundamentally entails the desire to exert and discharge one's strength. While self-preservation may represent a consequence of this will to power, it cannot be its central manifestation (Nietzsche, 2003:13). Consequently, life will always move forwards as all beings strive to find a means to fulfil their purpose, even under adverse circumstances (Rogers, 2004: 119). When individuals are unable to actualise their full potential, they may experience trauma, since any disruption in the continuity of human life can be viewed as a form of trauma. As articulated by Stern (2010), suffering interrupts the narrative flow of one's life, rendering it difficult to process. The long-lasting effects of trauma are often uncontrollable, primarily because emotions such as fear and guilt tend to elude conscious control. This reality contributes to the sombre nature of the human condition, as poignantly expressed by the statement "When a stone is dropped into a pond, the water continues quivering even after the stone has sunk to the bottom" (Golden, 2005: 123). In postcolonial contexts, a collective approach to trauma is preferred over an individualistic one. The pluralistic perspective better recognises the need for a multidimensional analysis of trauma, encompassing historical, social, cultural and political factors, as well as the concept of *hot potato* as a substitute for transgenerational emotional baggage (English, 1969).

Of all the afflictions, the harshness of the real world emerges as the most excruciating, for it is within the mundane that true horror lies (Browning, 2005). Research suggests that reading literature can have numerous cognitive and emotional benefits. It can enhance empathy, perspective-taking, critical thinking and overall well-being. These findings highlight the enduring importance and impact of literature on individuals, even in the midst of changing reading habits (Djikic et al., 2013; Kidd and Castano, 2013; Jacobs, 2015). The world of fiction can mainly be perceived as a representation of the author's conscious and subconscious approaches to their own traumas. Hence, therapeutic writing can yield narratives wherein characters endeavour either to heal their personal wounds or to conceal them within their inner worlds. Cathy Caruth, a prominent figure in deconstructive trauma theory, elucidates Freud's implementation of literature in articulating traumatic events, highlighting the intricate interplay between knowledge and ignorance. This convergence serves as the juncture where psychoanalytic theories of traumatic experience intersect with the language of literature (1995: 3). Anne Whitehead similarly recognises the transformative power of literature in representing and bearing witness to trauma (2004: 85). Going deeper into the intricate aspects of a traumatic experience, Caruth emphasises that the experience itself represents a wound that cannot be usually understood through conventional means. Expressed through delayed narratives, this wound gradually emerges until it becomes an integral part of one's actions and language (1995: 4).

Understanding the narrative of trauma therefore requires interdisciplinary collaboration (Chowdhury and Ruch, 2008; Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009). As such, in recent years, trauma research has seen several significant collaborative developments. Neurobiological approaches have thus gained prominence, delving into the impact of trauma on the brain's structure and function, and the potential for neuroplasticity to facilitate healing (Cross et al., 2017; Appelbaum et al., 2023; Peckham, 2023). The adoption of trauma-informed care practices has expanded across various domains, emphasizing the need for sensitive and supportive responses to individuals who have experienced trauma (Holmes et al., 2023). Furthermore, researchers are increasingly recognizing the importance of cultural factors in

understanding trauma experiences and responses (Theisen-Womersley, 2021). Technology has played a crucial role, with virtual reality, telehealth, and digital tools being utilized in trauma research and therapy (Riva and Gamberini, 2000; Guan et al., 2022; Ong et al., 2022; Amjad et al., 2023). There is also a growing focus on resilience and post-traumatic growth, uncovering the factors that enable individuals to thrive after trauma. Additionally, the long-term effects of childhood trauma on development and mental health have remained a significant research focus. In parallel, epigenetic research has revealed how traumatic experiences can leave lasting imprints on a person's genetic makeup, offering insights into intergenerational effects of trauma (Cao-Lei et al., 2022). Treatment innovations have emerged, with approaches like EMDR and somatic experiencing gaining popularity and undergoing evaluation for their effectiveness (Schlief, 2023; D'Antoni et al., 2022).

Following an interdisciplinary-holistic examination of trauma and its underlying causes, the present study ultimately conveys the writer Kazuo Ishiguro's psychoanalytic perspective on human existence, specifically exploring the relationship between memory, identity and chronic emotional turmoil as a means of navigating post-traumatic stress disorder in real life.

A socio-physiological reality

Within the worlds of trauma, numerous terms serve to capture its multifaceted nature, such as emotional distress, adverse life events, distressing incidents, traumatic stressors, shocking or overwhelming events, disturbing or harrowing experiences, to name but a few. The causes of trauma span a wide spectrum, ranging from natural disasters, accidents, combat or war, violent assaults, displacement, loss or bereavement, and medical events to domestic violence and physical or sexual abuse (Kolk et al., 2007). Furthermore, a noteworthy distinction exists between adult-onset trauma and childhood trauma that manifests in adults, which comprises adverse experiences during childhood, such as neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse or parental substance abuse, with long-lasting effects (Wilson and Keane, 2013). Survivors of trauma commonly believe that only fellow survivors can genuinely comprehend their experiences. This sense of isolation and divergence from the broader world can persist due to the inability of friends and family members to engage with the survivor's narrative. Moreover, short-term treatment models often normalise posttraumatic symptoms without addressing the survivor's need for comprehension. Dissociation and a permanently altered sense of self can therefore arise as a consequence of trauma when every aspect of familiarity is cast into doubt (Herman, 2015; Courtois and Ford, 2020; Briere, 2006).

Failure of the fight-or-flight response can trigger chronic stress-related behaviour that can lead to a persistence of survival instincts in safer conditions. Furthermore, memory distortion due to trauma can result in emotional impairment, manifested through conditions like chronic fear, guilt, anxiety and depression (Kolk and Fisler, 1995). Fear is deeply rooted in the evolutionary history of both animals and humans. It encompasses a distinct biochemical response mechanism that serves to safeguard living organisms against perceived threats in everyday situations, such as social interactions, work, family and environmental circumstances, specific flora and fauna. When fear emerges in response to genuine imminent dangers, it represents a vital aspect of the adaptive fight-or-flight response, playing a crucial role in preserving life (Adolphs, 2013). However, when this precautionary emotion transforms into an uncontrollable state due to unfounded threats, it can indicate a more complex mental condition, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD thus represents a common outcome of traumatic experiences, characterised by intrusive memories, hypervigilance and emotional

numbing. Individuals of all ages can experience PTSD based on their responses to highly stressful or perilous events that can lead to emotional, psychological and/or physical trauma (Greca and Danzi, 2019). According to Ricoeur (1984), personal experiences transform into memories, which recede into the intricate worlds of recollection. The scholar further argues that the passage of time introduces more and more distance between individuals and their experiences, which inherently alters the way these experiences are remembered (Ricoeur, 2005: 65). Consequently, whoever has undergone trauma will tend to maintain attachments to the past, so the efforts to detach from these memories may exacerbate the effects of post-traumatic stress rather than facilitate recovery (Ricoeur, 2009).

It seems unlikely to find an individual who has not encountered some form of trauma during their lifetime. Traumatic experiences could debilitate even the most resilient individuals, so feeling extreme fear, worry and/or tension after the conclusion of a traumatic event does not represent a sign of weakness. Despite its prevalence, the authenticity and intensity of traumatic symptoms remain undiminished (Kolk, 2015: 97). The feeling of helplessness could persist indefinitely when traumatised individuals contend with disruptive sensations, recurrent and distorted memories, excessive fear and enduring guilt.

Figure 1. Trauma manifestations
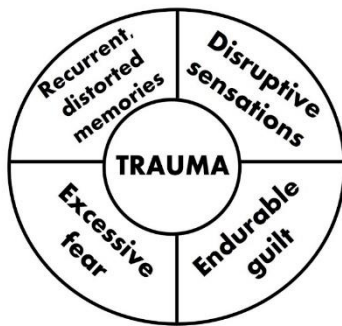
Identifying the diverse manifestations of trauma proves challenging in most cases (Stevens, 2009: 2). However, to perceive post-traumatic stress disorder solely as a brain disorder that requires medication can severely hamper the recovery process. The healing power of social interaction, communication and the provision of a safe environment should never be overlooked. It is through these means that individuals can activate their own self-regulatory capacities. As Kolk highlights, the brain-disease model disregards four fundamental truths: humans' capacity to heal one another, the transformative power of language, humans' ability to regulate physiological functions through activities like breathing, movement, and touch, and the potential to modify social conditions to foster safety and well-being (2015: 231). Humans confront an inherent vulnerability to both internal and external sources of suffering. Freud suggests that suffering originates from three distinct sources: the inevitable decay of the physical body, the potential onslaught of external forces and the intricate world of human relationships (1962: 77). But what if humans could not experience fear? Could a fearless mind interpret traumatic events in a different manner? While this reality may appear far-fetched, there are some instances of clinically fearless individuals.

Arguably the most renowned case to date involves SM[2], a middle-aged American woman diagnosed with Urbach-Wiethe[3], a genetic disorder characterised by abnormal calcium

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[2] The case of SM (initials used to protect her identity) is one of the most renowned cases involving Urbach-Wiethe disease, a rare genetic disorder characterised by abnormal calcium deposits in the brain. SM's case has been extensively studied by neuroscientists for almost 19 years (Feinstein and Adolphs, 2011: 2579).

[3] It is generally estimated that there are only around 400 known cases of Urbach-Wiethe disease in the world. This is a relatively small number, making it a rare condition. However, the exact number may vary as new cases are discovered or reported over time. It is therefore important to note that the information provided is based on the knowledge available up until September 2021, and there may have been updates or advancements in research since then (Lee et al., 2012: 388).

deposits in the brain that occurred during late childhood. As a result, SM's amygdala hardened and became entirely unfunctional. The amygdala, an almond-shaped structure found bilaterally within the medial temporal lobe, plays a significant role in memory formation and processing emotions, particularly fear. It therefore acts as an instinctual, unconscious mechanism that alerts the body in the presence of danger, through survival responses such as increased heart rate and sweaty palms (Feinstein et al., 2011). Despite the calcification of her amygdala, SM can experience all other emotions, so her overall mental functioning remains intact. However, she cannot experience any degree of fear, ranging from mild fright to intense terror, and she also struggles to recognise fear in others' behaviour or appearance. An exception occurred in 2013, when researchers from the University of Iowa exposed SM to a low concentration of carbon dioxide, which induced a fear response related to the perceived threat of suffocation (Feinstein et al., 2013). Nonetheless, SM's case remains highly distinctive, as other individuals with the same condition continue to experience fear despite their inability to recognise it in others (Anderson and Phelps, 2002). This disparity may be attributed to the specific timing of the amygdala lesion and the concurrent impact on other brain regions. Given that the amygdala functions more as a processor than a producer of fear, it also acts as an intermediary between the perception of environmental threats and the brainstem's suggestion for an appropriate response (Adolphs et al., 1995). Consequently, SM appears incapable of evading fear-inducing situations, despite her awareness that she should react differently to them. Although numerous life experiences should leave her traumatised, SM thus lacks traumatic memories due to her inability to experience fear. This intriguing insight holds potential for advancing the understanding and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder, as it may offer valuable insights for individuals grappling with the aftermath of trauma. While the amygdala does not work in isolation, manipulating its activity could potentially pave the way for non-invasive, long-term treatment options for PTSD.

Jordy Cernik, another individual unaffected by fear, discovered in 2005 that he had been afflicted with Cushing's Syndrome, a condition characterised by excessive cortisol production, resulting from the overactivity of the pituitary and adrenal glands. Following the removal of his suprarenal glands, Cernik experienced a notable absence of natural excitement and motivation to engage with his environment. Most significantly, he realised a lack of fear in situations that would typically elicit such a response. However, the absence of adrenaline cushioning would lead to heightened sensitivity to pain, which intensified the perception of discomfort (Sharma, 2017). Nevertheless, as with SM's case, Cernik's fearless state holds potential implications for treating anxiety and the array of emotions linked to PTSD.

In a similar vein, some researchers have revealed a direct association between the cyclic patterns of heart contraction and relaxation and individuals' susceptibility to fear. During systole, the phase when the heart pumps blood throughout the body, individuals are more prone to experiencing fear compared to the diastole phase, when the heart exhibits a relaxed pattern of beating (Garfinkel et al., 2014). Considering the influence of the amygdala on the heart's fear response, the heart's ability to communicate with the brain in dealing with threatening situations further contributes to the potential for treating anxiety and PTSD.

In addition to chronic fear, post-traumatic behaviour often encompasses pathological regret and guilt, resulting from an altered perception of the traumatic event. Individuals suffering from PTSD thus tend to deem themselves responsible for the threatening situation, believing that they could have somehow prevented it. This erroneous belief also fosters a sense of personal

weakness and shame (Scaer, 2005). When addressing both short-term and long-term distress, it is crucial to harness life's inherent inclination towards growth and development, even in the most adverse circumstances. Similar to how plants persist in seeking avenues for progress throughout their existence, individuals impacted by trauma could find the strength within themselves to overcome turmoil and move forwards with their lives (Rogers, 2004). Thus, traumatised individuals could take control of their lives by assuming responsibility for their own actions and choices and exercising personal agency (Paglia, 1991: 104). Re-educating the body to conquer debilitating sensations can also stand as a critical step towards effectively addressing trauma over time (Kolk, 2015: 89). By recognising life's natural propensity for transformation, individuals can thus reclaim a sense of normalcy through appropriate assistance that can accurately assess traumatic stress and its psychological impact.

Integrative psychotherapy

All humans have the ability to participate in the creation and perpetuation of social meanings. While human behaviour and social institutions can be comprehended much like the natural world, the emergence of the postmodern critique in the mid-twentieth century challenged the conventional conception of reality, and illuminated the limitations of the scientific method in comprehending the intricate complexities of human experience (Frie, 2003). According to poststructuralist theories, the social world is not a stable and objective entity awaiting revelation, but rather a multitude of diverse discourses that describe and interpret it. As they do not derive from a pre-existing reality, such discourses give rise to divisions, hierarchies and categories that shape individuals' understanding of the world, hence the instability and elusiveness of meanings. Sense is therefore perpetually deferred, as it can never be fully or definitively achieved (Derrida, 2016; Foucault and Rabinow, 1994). However, by understanding the natural world, humans can find proactive ways to look at their traumas.

The study of memory, branching out into the worlds of PTSD, thus stems from the enduring aspiration to discover effective methods for healing, attenuating or even eradicating the haunting nightmares, flashbacks and recollections of traumatic experiences (King, 2000: 2). Surprising though it may sound, Freud (1950) advocated for reliving and reinforcing emotional experiences through recollection as a more effective approach than providing rational explanations of past traumas. Other scholars observed that most memories could indeed be accompanied by the feelings of the original experience, allowing individuals to relive and analyse events at the same time (Penfield and Perot, 1968). Similarly, Francine Shapiro (2018) developed Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing therapy (EMDR) based on the understanding that reliving and comprehending past traumas through evoking all senses, rather than solely intellectualising them, can be more beneficial.

Psychotherapy can therefore provide a means to help individuals formulate a cohesive trauma narrative without imposing a particular understanding of the world (Schore, 2012). However, professionals working with trauma may experience either compassion fatigue or vicarious traumatisation, both with negative impacts on the therapeutic process (Figley, 1995). Besides implementing regular self-care practices to reduce stress and fostering creativity to prevent burnout, professionals should aim at an integrative approach to psychotherapy. For instance, the concept of co-creative transactional analysis denotes collaborative dialogues and narratives that can engender novel psychoanalytic possibilities. This process thus recognises that reality embodies a socially constructed phenomenon and that meanings are therefore culturally produced (Tudor and Summers, 2014). Traumatic experiences fundamentally arise from the

instability and unreliability of reality. While the natural world operates under the governance of universal laws, the human world establishes its own sets of rules, often cloaking them in a theoretical framework known as common sense. Thus, although the intrapsychic processes involved in organising experiences may be biologically determined, the meanings individuals derive from those experiences are profoundly influenced by cultural factors. This realisation underscores the significance of therapists that make appropriate personal disclosures during their sessions, in transactional analysis and beyond (Schore, 2003). The therapist's capacity to acknowledge their own feelings of vulnerability and helplessness can create an environment conducive to a more comprehensive exploration, development and enrichment of meanings. The drive to make meaning of one's experiences can arise from a desire to impose a sense of control over one's upbringing, when it originates from the Child ego state, with its belief that knowledge provides a means of exerting control. From the more mature Adult ego state, however, a hasty rush to theorise can ultimately impede the uncovering of meaningful insights, perpetuating a recursive quandary (Rowland, 2016; Berne, 1961). Consequently, it becomes crucial for therapists to develop clinical theories and technical proficiencies that bridge the divide between the natural and human worlds, characterised by different types of vulnerability (Leigh and Silbert, 2016).

When confronted with existential concerns such as loss, death and the absence of control, one's instability of meaning can become unbearable, evoking primal fears. In such circumstances, there arises a need for a comprehensive and coherent theory that can offer sufficient explanations to counteract feelings of powerlessness and helplessness. Even the consensual realities that individuals rely upon may lack stability or reliability. Consequently, therapists must attend to the ways in which psychosocial and socio-political discourses contribute to the formation of personal meanings. By doing so, they can better comprehend how traumatised individuals construct their realities and can work in collaboration to develop new narratives that hold greater potential for growth and change. Through an exploration of meaning-making process within the context of psychotherapy, researchers can better investigate how trauma professionals employ theory as a defence mechanism against vulnerability. However, excessive theorising could restrict the unfolding of personal experiences and hinder the process of meaning-making, as it fosters a false sense of stability within ever-evolving societies. Instead, certain researchers advocate for fallibilism, which acknowledges the provisional and context-dependent nature of meaning-making. Fallibilism thus recognises the limitations of one's own perspective in the quest for truth. This sensibility introduces humility, allowing for the emergence of alternative meanings that strike a balance between the utilisation of theoretical frameworks and an acceptance of the subjective nature of meaning (Orange, 2009; Rowland, 2016: 285).

Neuroscientific investigations have revealed that the human brain operates in two distinct modes of thought: logical and nonlinear thinking. While speech predominantly resides in the left hemisphere, emotional expressions find their roots in the right hemisphere of the brain (Hargaden, 2016). The linear aspects of the psyche are often associated with the masculine archetype, whereas the poetic facets pertain to the feminine archetype. The latter represents a gateway to accessing the elusive language of the unconscious and embodies a receptive spirit and energy fundamental to the subconscious processes (Schore, 2019). Consequently, traumatic experiences, typically nonverbal in nature, cannot be addressed through cognitive approaches alone as logical language cannot adequately capture and express the nuances of the unconscious mind (Winnicott, 1965; Pinker, 1994; Gazzaniga, 2008; Siegel, 2012).

The human inclination for healing can manifest in behavioural patterns aimed at protection, gratification, support and defence. Individuals who are not seeking a cure may instead be driven by the pursuit of self-awareness, self-realisation, professional growth and a deeper understanding of their own identity (Scaer, 2005; Schore, 2003). Berne's metaphor of *secret gardens* can thus delineate a three-phase therapeutic process that encompasses the regressive, transgressive and progressive stages. These secret gardens represent visual depictions of what individuals would do if given the opportunity, and while some are fortunate enough to act on their desires, others wistfully remain outside the confines of their own walls (Berne, 1972: 130). The primary objective of engaging in garden work when addressing traumas is to facilitate the transition of the traumatised individual from the regressive phase to the transgressive phase and ultimately into the progressive phase. Emotional disturbance, characterised by disorder and confusion, can be better understood and addressed through the identification and naming of emotions, allowing individuals to differentiate between various emotional experiences, ascertain their causes and identify associated needs (Kolk and Fisler, 1995). Berne's operations of interrogation and specification serve as valuable tools in discerning whether a traumatic emotion is triggered by current events or is solely a result of past experiences. Reflection is also essential for analysing past actions to improve future practices and gain a broader perspective of oneself and the system as a whole (Novack, 2016).

While acknowledging trauma's significance is crucial, the denial of agency loss and victimisation can often be observed in traumatised children, which distinguishes them from those experiencing adult-onset trauma. The nature of the event itself plays a vital role in trauma formation, and recognition can therefore prevent confusion and isolation. Regardless of character type and prior psychopathology, many adults experience specific symptoms in response to life-threatening trauma and the likelihood of a psychological reaction increases with the intensity and duration of the traumatic event (Sampson, 2016). Since adult-onset trauma may not be rooted in early conflicts, developmental arrest or childhood trauma, adopting an epistemic model can enhance the therapeutic process, and concepts from transactional analysis, such as self-Adulting, decontamination, the drama triangle and mindfulness techniques, can assist in constructing a coherent narrative that facilitates self-knowledge, acceptance and even healing (Herman, 2015; Farber, 2010; Courtois and Ford, 2020). LaCapra proposes the concept of *empathic unsettlement* as a way to break the cycle of human suffering by being responsive to the traumatic experiences of others. *Empathic unsettlement* thus involves developing empathetic abilities that can contribute to reconfiguring the collective subconscious, which perpetuates the belief in the inevitability of pain and suffering. LaCapra also suggests that the ability to listen and bear witness to others' traumatic narratives depends on one's own potential for traumatisation along with the recognition that another person's loss is distinct from one's own (2009).

Therapeutic literature

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Western literature primarily focused on societal realities and aimed to provoke criticism and reform. By the 20th century, literature became more individualistic, addressing personal subjects like love, happiness and human needs while incorporating psychological elements (ChinaDaily, 2004: pos. 12). According to Emerson, the purpose of literature is to afford humans a platform from where they can command a view of their present lives (1995: 154). Bi Shumin, too, believes that "[t]he nature of writing is […] to talk about people, about the connections between people and nature, people and the universe.

Literature is the study of people" (ChinaDaily, 2004: pos. 33). The Chinese physician-turned-writer also runs a psychological clinic, and her motivation to write and be a psychiatrist stems from the same "interest in the workings of people's souls and a desire to help them". Drawing from her own experiences in Tibet, Shumin strives to inspire people to embrace life and find purpose beyond "social stigma and physio-psychic trauma" (ChinaDaily, 2004: pos. 36; Choi, 2016: 151). This multidimensional approach aligns with Caruth's praise for literary representations of life experiences with traumatic effects. As a trauma theorist, Caruth considers post-traumatic stress disorder across diverse disciplines, ranging from sociology, film and political activism to literature. In "Introduction: The Wound and the Voice", the renowned scholar argues that good fiction can present unexpected psychotherapeutic approaches to trauma that can transcend mere memories or post-traumatic nightmares. The intersection between psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience and the language of literature could thus render the complex interplay between knowing and not knowing (Caruth, 1996: 3). In a similar vein, Hartman (1995) describes a dualistic form of traumatic knowledge that can help with the interpretation of psychotherapeutic literature. This knowledge consists of two contradictory elements: the traumatic event, registered rather than directly experienced, and the perpetual reimagining of the event by the dissociated or bypassed psyche as a form of memory. The scholar suggests that literal interpretation in poetics aligns with the direct registration of the traumatic event, while figurative interpretation reflects the perpetual troping of the event by the dissociated psyche (Hartman, 1995: 537).

The concept of shared trauma can thus extend beyond its conventional meaning within the client-therapist relationship (Sampson, 2016: 343) as it can also encompass readers' traumatic experiences similar to those of the literary characters. Psycho-literature can indeed facilitate post-traumatic growth and personal transformation in real life by helping readers comprehend the challenges and transformations they may encounter based on their identification with fictional experiences.

The sensation of having nothing to lose can be so liberating that it supplants the bleak evaluations of a traumatised individual like Veronika[4], instilling within her a genuine affection for life (Coelho, 2006). Similarly, other individuals who have experienced mental afflictions manage to transform their seemingly hopeless lives into something meaningful, thus echoing Vonnegut's modest hope that "we are all here to help each other get through this thing, whatever it is" (2007: 118). In *Cat's Cradle*, Vonnegut employs the religion of *Bokonism* as an allegory of humanity's desperate quest for comforting significance. For all its deceiving nature, *Bokonism* possesses the capacity to engender positive change in those who choose to follow its false tenets. Thus, *Bokonism* harbours the potential to assuage the trauma stemming from the perceived insignificance of the human condition, yet only within *Karasses*, who seek a universal purpose, not within *Granfalloons*, who pursue transient goals like politics and social status (Vonnegut, 1999). In *Breakfast of Champions*, the author takes this idea further by illustrating that a broader perspective renders existential traumas superfluous, whether consciously or unconsciously (Vonnegut, 1999: 74).

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[4] Coelho's novel follows the journey of Veronika, a young woman who decides to end her life due to a deep sense of dissatisfaction and despair. However, instead of dying, she wakes up in a mental institution. Readers can focus on Veronika's transformation throughout her time in the institution and can explore how her encounters with other patients and the unconventional treatments offered there challenge her perception of reality and lead her to re-evaluate her decision to die.

Recent research on people's literary tastes suggests a mixed picture. On the one hand, there is evidence of a decline in overall reading rates, especially among younger generations, due to the rise of digital media, competing forms of entertainment and faulty school literature education. This decline may also be influenced by changes in lifestyle, attention spans and the availability of alternative sources of information and storytelling. However, studies also indicate that a significant portion of the population continues to value and engage with literature. Reading habits may have shifted towards shorter forms such as articles, blogs and social media posts, but there is still an appreciation for literary works, both classic and contemporary. Book clubs, literary festivals and online reading communities have emerged as platforms for discussion and engagement with good literature (Gordon, 2023; Bump, 2022; Xu et al., 2022; ChinaDaily, 2004: pos. 5; 38).

Psycho-literary works could therefore still provide powerful therapeutic modalities for addressing post-traumatic stress disorder as they can cultivate empathy and break the cycle of suffering by enabling readers to relive and analyse personal events from diverse perspectives (Bal and Veltkamp, 2013; Mar et al., 2009).

Ishigurian traumas

Within the worlds of trauma-based fiction, authors such as Paulo Coelho and Kurt Vonnegut have been recognised for their success in writing psycho-literature. As a therapeutic writer himself, Kazuo Ishiguro offers profound insights into familial and professional relationships during and after traumatic periods in human history as he equally draws from his Japanese heritage and his experiences as a social worker in Glasgow and London during the 1980s (Vorda and Herzinger, 1994).

The manipulation of time in Ishiguro's narratives, as a means of exploring the characters' recollections and experiences, can thus serve as a therapeutic device for addressing post-traumatic disorder in real life. Rather than aiming to recreate the past faithfully, Ishiguro's works delve into how individuals interpret and construct their personal worlds, imbuing them with therapeutic qualities: "Despite the superficial fixing of time in his work, the narrative frequently spins wildly through different eras. The dates Ishiguro likes to fix are merely the dates of recall" since his novels prioritise the exploration of individual interpretation and construction of the past over realistic portrayal, resulting in their therapeutic attributes (Sutcliffe, 2000: pos. 1). Ishiguro's protagonists seem to exhibit a conscious awareness of the implications of their own narratives, employing linguistic and emotional self-preservation strategies to repress elements that do not align with their existential standards. Their navigation through memory and the past is thus shaped by a keen understanding of what they must avoid, as they recognise that the treacherous and ambiguous nature of memory can contribute to self-deception (Shaffer and Wong, 2008). In essence, Ishigurian individuals grapple with conflicting emotions that lead to a distorted perception of time, as they strive to unravel their sense of self, experiences of loss and feelings of abandonment, rooted in their past encounters (Călinescu, 2021). By recounting their stories, Ishiguro's characters, be they mothers, painters, butlers, pianists, detectives, clones, peace negotiators, elderly partners or artificially-intelligent companions, embark on cathartic journeys, reconstructing their past experiences as they navigate uncertain futures (Wong, 2005: 2).

A Pale View of Hills presents several survivors of the devastating nuclear attack in Nagasaki, in different periods after the unspeakable event. Guo's factual account of the cataclysmic

culmination of the Pacific War serves as a poignant reminder of an impossible full recovery from such a profound trauma (Guo, 2012: 2508). Besides the survivor's guilt, Etsuko's suffering stems from her yearning for independence, which manifests as a rebellion against the strict societal expectations placed upon mothers in Japan (Guo, 2015: 37). After the bombing attack that claims her parents' lives, the young Etsuko lives in Ogata-San's house. During her early years as an orphan, Etsuko seeks refuge in playing the violin during the nights. When she finds herself trapped in an unhappy marriage to Jiro, she resorts to suppressing her true emotions in order to conform to societal expectations (Lebra, 2007: 143). However, as time passes, her trauma deepens, leading to a detached approach to life that inflicts irreparable pain upon her Japanese daughter, who later commits suicide (Ishiguro, 1990: 27).

Keiko's decision to end her life represents an escape from a world of invisibility, indifference and pain. From a stoical standpoint, her suicide can be perceived as the antithesis to cowardice (Epictetus, 2013: 26). Yet deliberately breaking the body before its time will always carry implications that surpass human comprehension and acceptance, despite certain spiritual explanations, particularly within Buddhist, Hinduist and Daoist traditions. Obviously, Etsuko's detached narrative serves as a defence mechanism against overwhelming suffering (Hutton, 2016: 22). Since memories have the capacity to suppress traumatic feelings, even when similar experiences resurface in the present, Etsuko's emotional numbing can be viewed as a manifestation of dissociative identity disorder (DID), which involves "a rigid separation of parts of experiences, including somatic experiences, consciousness, affects, perception, identity and memory" (Howell, 2013: ix; Galton, 2008).

The concept of individuals exchanging bodies has captivated the imagination of writers and artists for years (Petkova and Ehrsson, 2008). Ishiguro, too, explores this theme as Etsuko undergoes a traumatic manipulation of perception and multisensory information that may have led to an identity swap with Sachiko, hence the probability of frequently abusing her first daughter. Described as Etsuko's alter ego, Sachiko thus emerges as an attempt to grapple with memories that Etsuko cannot fully accept as her own (Matek, 2018: 135).

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Masuji Ono frequently experiences mental blankness, hence his pronounced unreliability in recounting his past. The divergence between reality and the narrative can be categorised into two divisions, each with three subdivisions. The first division pertains to the transmission of information, which can be either completely erroneous or incomplete at times. Erroneous narration can, in turn, manifest as misreporting, misreading/misinterpreting or misevaluating/misregarding the events conveyed. Insufficient information, on the other hand, can manifest as underreporting, underreading/ underinterpreting or underregarding/underevaluating the knowledge about specific facts (Phelan, 2005: 45-50). The interplay between these types of unreliability depends on the nature of the narrative and encompasses questions about the extent of the protagonist's self-awareness as a narrator, the boundaries of realism, the alternate moments of truth-telling or falsehood, and the capacity for judgment (Booth, 1983: 165).

In psychology, confabulation[5] is commonly associated with various cognitive disorders, including memory conformity, suggestibility, source misattribution, the misinformation and

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[5] The term originated from the field of psychology and was introduced by the neuropsychologist Carl Wernicke in the late 19th century. Confabulation refers to the production of false or distorted memories without the intention to deceive, often seen in individuals with certain brain injuries or psychiatric conditions (Schnider, 2008).

false memory effects or physical damage to brain regions such as the frontal lobe and the corpus callosum (Bernecker, 2017: 1207). In Ishiguro's second novel, confabulation serves to fill in memory gaps, which suggests that Ono may be susceptible to the false memory effect. Ono's blank gazes, devoid of any conscious thought, could thus be a reflection of his unconscious desire to conceal frequent memory lapses. Depending on the nature of the invented narratives, confabulation may involve either embarrassing fabrications or fantastic constructions, both of which evident in Ono's recollections. Since confabulation can be closely related to trauma, Ono's fabrication may happen unintentionally. This aligns with the perspective of some neurobiological researchers, who suggest that trauma-based recollections are located in different regions of the brain, resulting in a non-verbal reliving that mainly focuses on emotions, sensations and flashbacks (Kolk and Hart, 1991). As a consequence, the Ishigurian protagonist frequently becomes burdened with guilt for past transgressions, attributing culpability to himself based on his own beliefs. This emotional upheaval, stemming from the radical changes in Ono's life, leads to a reversal or mixing of the moral labels associated with his past choices and decisions. In essence, Masuji Ono's trauma lies in his inability to assess the extent of the harm he has caused within the context of Japanese history (Călinescu, 2023). Throughout the narrative, the old painter therefore grapples with determining the extent of his culpability and seeks answers in the verbal and behavioural responses of others to his presence, although most witnesses to his personal history are either deceased or profoundly traumatised. The old artist desires punishment and closure, or alternatively, a chance to apologise for the crimes he has committed, if only he could ascertain the full extent of his transgressions.

Upon closer examination, Ono's present trauma results from events happening long before he embraced his path as a nationalistic artist. His childhood and early adulthood may thus have fostered an intense artistic patriotism as a means of rebelling against circumstances beyond his control during periods of natural growth and development. This could be a case of nested trauma, where "different levels of traumatic experiences might have an enduring effect in yielding a trauma-based topographic and dynamic re-organisation of the nested model of self, featured by dissociation" (Scalabrini et al., 2022: 1). By revisiting specific events, Masuji Ono discerns their traumatic nature, which compels him to relive them in search of closure, whether through punishment, forgiveness or self-forgiveness. Ono's father vehemently opposes his son's artistic pursuits, while his teacher advocates for capturing the fleeting beauty and pleasure of the "floating world". The young Ono views Moriyama's approach as wasteful in terms of energy, time and talent, but in hindsight, the old artist admits that he might have blended the grandiosity of his teacher' words with his own methods of influencing his pupils. The protagonist does not exhibit resistance to change, nor is he entirely disloyal to his previous beliefs. Rather, he appears to have detached himself from the collective attitudes associated with the groups he once belonged to, hence his decision to no longer paint. However, he finds himself uncertain about how to navigate a situation where he cannot choose the predefined options of his peers, such as committing an apologetic suicide, altering his mindset or harbouring resentment towards remnants of militaristic values. As a young artist, Ono opted to paint subjects with militaristic messages instead of embracing the ephemeral pleasures of the "floating world", so his earlier memories depict him as a significant cog in the societal mechanisms. But what if he might have been nothing more than an ordinary man all along? It is during his younger daughter's *miai*, a traditional Japanese marriage meeting, that Masuji Ono publicly confesses his crimes and asks for forgiveness for the transgressions

of his nationalistic past. His words, however, seem to elude understanding, and Setsuko's remark exposes the underlying banality of most individuals throughout history: "Father was simply a painter. He must stop believing he has done some great wrong" (Ishiguro, 1989: 193). Ono's decision to start painting again, at the end of the novel, may represent a resigned acknowledgement of both his existential and his historical insignificance.

In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens' trauma stems from his complex relationship with his father, a former butler who served as a role model and source of guidance in his formative years. While the novel primarily explores themes of identity, self-denial, moral dilemmas, implicit duty and unquestioning loyalty, it is these themes that shed light on what has profoundly impacted the butler's personal and professional life. The weight of his father's expectations and the burden of living up to his legacy contribute to Stevens' unrelenting pursuit of perfection. This pressure creates a deep-rooted fear of failure and an inability to acknowledge his own limitations, hence his blind commitment to his role as a butler. Throughout the novel, Stevens' traumatic manifestations are subtly revealed through introspective reflections and moments of vulnerability, which prove that his detached, stoic demeanour may be only a coping mechanism to shield himself from the painful emotions associated with his past.

Stevens' relentless pursuit of professionalism and dignity causes him to suppress his humanity, as well as his desire to form meaningful connections with others. However, Stevens' loyalty to a master whose political activities proved so misguided forces the butler to confront the moral implications of his servitude, which leads to his professional downfall—or rather his slow humanisation—during the era of his American employer. Consequently, at the novel's conclusion, Stevens suffers a short crisis of conscience at the belated realisation that he might have misspent his personal life (Ishiguro, 1989: 255). Besides the far-reaching consequences of emotional repression, Stevens' trauma also reflects the struggle between Ishiguro's heritage and affinity for *Englishness*, encapsulated in this message of human liberation: Be "less Japanese, less bent on dignity, [...] less restrained and controlled" (Annan, 1989: 4).

In *When We Were Orphans*, Christopher Banks experiences a profound existential crisis upon losing his parents as a boy, which fundamentally alters the purpose and meaning he attributes to life. Banks' trauma thus renders him entangled in the illusionary pursuit of rescuing his parents and, by extension, the entire world. Ishiguro emphasises that many individuals struggle to relinquish the worldview imprinted during their formative years, carrying with them a traumatised understanding of reality into adulthood. Banks exemplifies this phenomenon, as he continues to perceive the world through the lens established at the moment his parents vanished one by one. He, therefore, attributes all the adversities he encounters in life to their disappearance and harbours the belief that finding them would rectify all his problems (Blake).

The impact of the environment on the development and perpetuation of trauma also represents a significant aspect explored in the novel. The renowned detective still feels affected by the distressing conditions of the slum Chapei he witnessed in his childhood. The vivid description of overcrowded rooms and families resorting to further partitioning to share space and afford rent illustrates the traumatic surroundings that also shape Banks' perception, at a subconscious level (Ishiguro, 2001: 15). Upon his return to war-torn China in search of his parents, the haunting memories of Chapei intertwine with the devastating consequences of the ongoing conflict (Ishiguro, 2001: 264). Jaggi (1995) aptly observes that the novel delves into the enduring wounds of childhood, which continue to influence and distort adulthood, often at the cost of personal relationships and happiness. Indeed, the protagonist struggles to

engage in irrational passion or surrender to intense emotions, as he clings to the safety provided by his logical reasoning. This resistance to relinquishing control over his feelings stems from a fear of being caught off guard by the sudden disappearance of someone he loves (Ishiguro, 2001: 292). Banks' narratives in the novel thus serve as representations of his psychological states, including nostalgia and melancholy, inextricably linked to the traumatic losses he has experienced (Weston, 2012: 337).

Within the extensive and enigmatic narrative of *The Unconsoled*, Ishiguro portrays yet another form of parental trauma: the implantation of toxic messages into a child's subconscious through familial discord. The distressing aftermath of the protagonist's upbringing entails feelings of chronic anxiety, guilt and shame during his adult life. Unlike Stevens' paternal trauma, which leads to the sacrifice of his personal happiness for the sake of his profession, yet only in hindsight, Ryder's deep-seated yearning for parental recognition results in a fragmented sense of self and security at the core of his internal battles. An episode from Ryder's childhood, which involves his friend Fiona Roberts, unveils the complex dynamics of child rearing in a hyper-competitive postmodern society fixated on control and performance. Fiona possesses knowledge about the underlying cause of Ryder's parents' constant arguments, but she is forbidden from disclosing it (Ishiguro, 2013: 172-173). Ryder's most toxic influence seems to originate from his domineering father, who perpetually undermined his achievements, disregarding his standing in the artistic world.

During his three-day sojourn in an unnamed town, Ryder grapples with the weight of meeting others' expectations while feeling perpetually inadequate, although the external perception depicts him as self-assured and self-contained. The clash between Ryder's person and persona highlights, once again, the profound impact of parental validation and approval on one's well-being. The emphasis on control and performance becomes ingrained in Ryder's mind, perpetuating a cycle of self-doubt and constant evaluation. When his parents fail to show up for his concert, the pianist's sense of unworthiness escalates, although they may have long departed from this world, as intimated by the labyrinthine complexities of the narrative (Călinescu, 2023).

Within the pages of *Never Let Me Go*, the clones' fate may reflect a deep-seated cynicism towards the human condition and the acceptance of a predetermined destiny. The protagonists Kathy, Ruth and Tommy are confronted with the question of escape, prompting inquiries into the nature of existence itself. But where to go in a world that believes that emotions are only natural "to everything that is naturally created" (Ray, 2017: 780)? Ishiguro's exploration of this existential dilemma resonates with Diogenes' belief that true virtue lies in aligning oneself with nature and one's inner instincts, rather than with societal expectations and status. These concepts of cynicism can also be observed across various subsequent philosophical movements, such as Spinoza's pantheism, Hume's scepticism, Emerson's transcendentalism and Nietzsche's nihilism (MacCunn, 1904). As the head guardian of Hailsham, Miss Emily creates a system that provides a humane childhood for the clones, as she aims to prove their humanity through art and creativity. In contrast, Miss Lucy challenges this approach, advocating for transparency and the acknowledgement of their predetermined future as organ donors (Ishiguro, 2010: 262). The clash between these perspectives may therefore reflect the characters' struggle to reconcile their cynicism with the desire to preserve innocence and protect the clones from the painful truth. The trauma experienced by the human characters, such as Madame and Miss Emily, also results from the world's treatment of clones

as commodities rather than people, despite the undisclosed benefactors that subsidized the Hailsham students' costly education:

> The world didn't want to be reminded how the donation program really worked. They didn't want to think about the students or the conditions they were brought up in. In other words, they wanted you back in the shadows … (Ishiguro, 2010: 259)

While the clones seem to accept their predetermined fate, the complex interplay between their independent thinking and their passive acceptance may only constitute an emotional example of modern cynicism (The Economist, 2005). Tommy emerges as the most vocal cynic among the clones, expressing his internal harmony in a world that denies their humanity. When he discovers that love cannot change their destiny, his outburst reflects his deep frustration and defiance. In contrast, Kathy, always the caregiver, suppresses her true emotions, providing comfort to Tommy, although she remains faithful to her memories as a form of opposition even as she accepts her fate (Ishiguro, 2010: 264). Their final embrace symbolises their simultaneous resistance and resignation to the world's cruelty, holding onto each other to prevent being swept away by the overwhelming despair (Ishiguro, 2010: 233). Ishiguro's narrative probes the existential quandary of human existence and the resilience that allows individuals to navigate a reality that falls short of their dreams and aspirations. The novel's trauma therapy thus delves into the reasons why most individuals do not succumb to despair and explores the personal struggle to reconcile with one's unfulfilled potential (Harrison, 2005).

In *The Buried Giant*, the elderly couple embarks on a journey to regain their lost memories, but their past trauma leads to the death of their son and alters their present love. Axl discovers that he has been unable to reconcile with his wife's infidelity, choosing instead to suppress his resentment: "When it was too late for rescue, it was still early enough for revenge" (Ishiguro, 2015: 272). As a form of punishment, Axl denies both himself and Beatrice the opportunity to grieve for their son at his tomb. What appears as a quest for truth becomes a path to an irreparable purgatory, inhabited by tormented souls and traumatised nations, namely the Britons and the Saxons.

The characters undergo role reversals, transforming from wrongdoers to saviours and vice versa. Wistan, initially portrayed as a hero in his mission, ultimately becomes an unwitting facilitator of renewed conflict. Sir Gawain, the aged guardian of the dragoness, represents a mere relic of his former self[6]. His armour looks tarnished, his tunic worn and patched, and his once abundant hair has thinned and turned white. Despite recognising the futility of his endeavours, Sir Gawain remains committed to his mission, even though the collective amnesia that he seeks to uphold also contributes to the individual and collective traumas in the novel. While the preservation of Querig's life serves to conceal the atrocities of war, her death would perpetuate a cycle of violence and revenge, rather than promoting reconciliation. The narrative refrains from addressing specific historical atrocities, yet it encompasses their essence within its scope as a reflection on the cyclical nature of human conflicts and the challenges of healing in the face of buried traumas (Borowska-Szerszun, 2016: 34).

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[6] Ishiguro drew inspiration from the chivalric romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, written in the late fourteenth century (Simpson, 2008: 18). This source served as a minor influence on the creation of the fantastical atmosphere found in *The Buried Giant*, as well as the depiction of the geriatric character Sir Gawain: «I particularly liked the fact that ogres were mentioned just in passing, as though they were like untamed bulls, an everyday hazard that Gawain had to contend with» (Kite, 2015: pos. 3).

Throughout *Klara and the Sun*, the exploration of memory and loss prompts contemplation of the human and non-human nature, the fragility of life and the pursuit of meaning. Klara, the artificially-intelligent protagonist, experiences *emotional* trauma as she grapples with her role as Josie's companion. The fear of losing her 14-year-old human, whom she refuses to substitute in the eventuality of Josie's death, is paired with her genuine feeling of hopelessness about ever attaining a "human heart" (Shang, 2022). Josie's physical trauma results from the Mother's decision to have her daughter *lifted*. Her deteriorating health engenders a sense of vulnerability and fear that will also permeate her relationships with others. Thus, Josie's distancing from Klara after the Morgan's Falls trip further reflects the impact of trauma on interpersonal connections.

Ishiguro's last novel also explores various ways to navigate trauma. Josie turns to art, particularly the *bubble game*, as a means of expressing herself and understanding others' perspectives. Rick seeks solace in his projects and endeavours to find his own path outside the expectations imposed by society. The AF Klara relies on her steadfast belief in the power of the Sun to alleviate or even heal all traumas (Ajeesh and Rukmini, 2023). From a scientific perspective, all living organisms on Earth require a continual supply of low entropy in order to sustain their progress through time; this vital source comes from the sun, which emits hot photons while the earth emits ten times as many cold photons. When these photons interact, life emerges, creating a balance in chemical reactions within animal and human bodies. This process increases entropy, but photosynthesis in plants counteracts it by storing energy and providing nourishment for people and animals (Buchanan, 2017: 106). Such is the power of Klara's Sun over "the Cootings Machine", which serves as a metaphor for the pollution that exacerbates the characters' suffering!

Klara's relocation to the Yard of old machinery represents the climax of her trauma, as the process of *slow fading* entails a gradual decline in physical and cognitive functioning, besides the unbearable feeling of having been abandoned and forgotten after Josie gets well. As with Cathy in *Never Let Me Go*, Klara's acceptance of her fate stems from her ability to replay cherished memories and thus to maintain a semblance of identity and purpose, as well as machine ethics (Stenseke, 2022).

Conclusion

The present study aims to establish a theoretical framework for understanding the interplay between different modes of thought, the unconscious mind and the role of language in expressing and processing trauma. The research thus delves into various aspects of trauma, including child development, therapeutic approaches and transactional analysis, exploring concepts such as trauma recognition, the impact of trauma on agency and victimisation, the significance of constructing a coherent narrative and the role of self-knowledge in the therapeutic process. The sources therein offer an interdisciplinary approach to comprehending the complex nature of trauma, and emphasise the need to challenge individual-focused trauma theories while recognising the importance of collective trauma. By shedding some light on these areas, the present research aims to contribute to the understanding of trauma within postcolonial contexts, through collaborative analysis, of psycho-literature included.

Acknowledging that most humans struggle to overcome trauma, even in the absence of physical injury, property damage or bereavement, remains of paramount importance for therapists and

therapeutic writers alike. Intellectual knowledge alone proves insufficient to facilitate the healing process for trauma survivors, which further underlines the importance of adopting an interdisciplinary approach when investigating the many worlds of individual and collective trauma.

Kazuo Ishiguro's novels explore psychotherapeutic themes related to the concept of identity, with past traumas influencing the lives of his characters. The Ishigurian approach engenders empathy and compassion, allowing readers to contemplate the complexities of trauma and its impact on interpersonal connections. By exploring memory as a coping mechanism, Ishiguro's novels prompt reflection on the human experience in the face of loss and gradual deterioration. Ultimately, all Ishigurian characters exemplify the resilience of human life despite the fragility of the human condition, within a vast entropic Universe, which humankind perceives as the only physical reality.

Throughout history, humanity has collectively faced the consequences of disregarding the natural order. While various schools of psychotherapy have emerged in order to facilitate trauma healing, Ishiguro's psycho-literature suggests that full emotional recovery may not be attainable after all. Instead, coexisting with one's inner wounds may be the ultimate resolution, as expressed by Brodsky, a former esteemed musician, in *The Unconsoled*: "This is a precious time. Come. Caress your wound now. It will be there for the rest of your life. But caress it now, while it's raw and bleeding. Come" (Ishiguro, 2013: 372).

There are scholars who believe that, in today's world, true literature is undervalued due to rapid technological advancement, global focus on practical matters and a decline in literary taste. However, whenever basic needs are met, and personal lives become stable, appreciation for good literature resurfaces, even in countries that may lack modern literature that is worth reading. Impactful and socially insightful literature can, therefore, serve as a powerful tool for readers to convey and re-experience emotional scenes and personal events at their own pace. Such literary works will always offer cathartic narratives that can address readers' traumas, not least because the interpretation of trauma in fiction may vary among readers, regardless of authors' intentions. This sensory approach, grounded in the interconnectedness of memory, emotional experiences and the efficacy of reliving or recalling past traumas, thus fosters recognition and appreciation of moments of happiness amidst the flawed nature of human existence. All in all, embracing the wound from both human and higher perspectives, rather than seeking complete healing, could become a more realistic approach to post-traumatic life.

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