



Trauma and Recovery in Jeannette Walls's *The Silver Star*

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Abstract

In the 1990s, the first wave of trauma theories was raised to extend the boundaries of psychological trauma studies into other fields, including literary theories and literature. Jeannette Walls (1960-), an American author and journalist, writes about her characters' resistance to life's adversities in her novels. Despite the existing studies on her most well-known novel *The Glass Castle* (2006), her other novel, *The Silver Star* (2013), has been marginalized since its publication. Thus, this study addresses *The Silver Star* and examines the "trauma and recovery" of the two main characters, Charlotte and Liz. It deploys Judith Herman's trauma theory which focuses on the symptoms, effects, and recovery process of "post-traumatic stress disorder". Following the experienced traumatic moments, Charlotte and Liz bear three main symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, including "hyperarousal", "intrusion", and "constriction". As a primary effect of PTSD, they also disconnect themselves from their family and society while desperately seeking help to be recovered. The study argues that Walls represents social support as the most influential element in the "recovery" process of PTSD. The findings show that the recovery process varies according to the support that each character receives; Charlotte is not able to progress in the recovery process without receiving sufficient support from others while Liz recovers by getting enough support to construct a sense of safety.

Keywords: Jeannette Walls, *The Silver Star*, post-traumatic stress disorder, Judith Herman, memories

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Introduction

In the 1990s, the scope of trauma studies expanded from psychology to other fields, including literature. Pierre Janet's and Sigmund Freud's theories are central to the first wave of trauma studies scholarship, which focuses on the philosophy of trauma and how trauma affects memory and identity. This theory and subsequent criticisms explore emotional distress in texts, as well as the vocabulary of loss, disruption, and fragmentation (Balaev, 2018). According to the first wave of trauma theory, trauma is defined as "a speechless void, unrepresentable, inherently pathologic, timeless, and repetitious" (Balaev & Satterlee, 2012, p. 3). Similarly, Balaev (2018) mentions that "the field of trauma studies continues to develop and adapt the foundational poststructural approach as well as incorporate new perspectives from postcolonialism, feminist theory, ethnic studies, and ecocriticism in scholarship that examines trauma's significance in literature and society" (p. 369). In fact, later studies increased the domain of psychological trauma into other fields, especially literature, and literary theories. Trauma is now regarded as an interdisciplinary subject dealing with different domains such as psychology, history, and literature.

The American author and journalist, Jeannette Walls (1960-), writes about resistance to the adversities of life in her novels, including her most well-known memoir, *The Glass Castle* (2006), *Half Broke Horses: A True-Life Novel* (2009), and *The Silver Star* (2013), which makes them proper cases for trauma studies. Based on her memoir, Walls's personal life can be considered as a prime example of resistance to the hardships of living in a dysfunctional family. Likewise, *The Silver Star* is about the mastery of a family over distress. This novel is the story of a family trying to achieve stability in their lives and identities. Liz and Jean (known as Bean in the novel) are half-sisters who live with their artistic mother, Charlotte Holladay. After their mother leaves them for a long time, they decide to leave their house in Lost Lake to visit their uncle in Byler. In Byler, they find out the truth about their mother's past and her relationship with her family. They also know the story of their fathers and how their father's separations from Charlotte have affected her life. Later, Liz and Bean realize that they need to find a job to pay for their costs in their mother's absence. Thus, they start working for Maddox, who is the manager of the town's factory. However, their uncle, Tinsley, opposes this idea because he knows that he will make trouble for children one day. As Tinsley expected, this job caused trouble for Liz, which resulted in a rape experience with Maddox. At the end of the novel, Walls reveals that despite the harsh experiences, the family is able to create a sense of healing and sincerity among them.

Even though Walls's novels focus on overcoming personal and social difficulties, there are not many studies looking at their psychological aspects. *The Glass Castle* has been explored by Beste Yigitler in *Quest for the Self in Jeannette Walls' The Glass Castle*. In this dissertation, Yigitler (2021) deploys Freudian trauma theory, Lacanian mirror stage theory, and certain Jungian archetypes to examine the characters' endeavors in finding their identity. She aims to show the impact of traumas, childhood memories, and uncompleted stages of personality on the psyche and the construction of characters' identities. She contends that "Walls'

memoir depicts the problems of the individual lives in the modern world” (p. 69). Moreover, she maintains that Jeannette, who has distanced herself from nature and has delved into the modern world, forgets her true identity and self. The findings reveal that one can have a peaceful life only through the negotiation of conscious and subconscious, which results in finding the self.

The Glass Castle has also received a passing reference in “Trauma and Young Adult Literature: Representing Adolescence and Knowledge in David Small’s *Stitches: A Memoir*” by Gilmore and Marshall (2013). They examine the formation of young adults’ identity deploying theories of trauma and self-representation. In this article, the authors include Jeannette Walls’ *The Glass Castle* as a “counterexample to *Stitches*” in its representation of traumatic experiences (p. 22). They maintain that Walls aims to represent the traumatic experience of an adolescent who “ends up wiser for the hardship, difficulty is incorporated into a meaningful lesson” (p. 23). Unlike the example provided by Walls, in Small’s representation of trauma in *Stiches*, there is “no moral uplift or principle through which stability can be reasserted” (p. 35). Rather, he highlights “the ongoing work of representing his experience and perspective in the visual and verbal idiom of witness” (p. 35).

As with *The Glass Castle*, Walls’s *The Silver Star* also fleshes out the impact of traumatic experiences in the life of characters. The first half of the novel focuses on the past traumatic experiences of Charlotte, while the second half focuses on Liz’s experiences with Maddox. These two parts have in common the experienced traumas, the reaction of family members and society, and the effect of social support on each character’s psyche. *The Silver Star*, thus, can be considered as a proper case to be examined from a psychological perspective. Yet, as the author’s latest novel published in 2013, it has not still received due recognition by researchers. This study, thus, aims to analyze *The Silver Star* to cast light on the traumatic experiences, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, and the role of social support on the PTSD recovery process of two characters in the novel. Herman’s theories on “trauma and recovery” address humans’ psychological disorders by examining how traumatic experiences can be best dealt with and the ways that help the survivors of trauma to progress on the various stages of recovery in life. By applying Herman’s theories on the development of psychological health to scrutinize the traumatic experiences of the chosen characters, we aim to bridge the two fields of literature and psychology; this case study helps showcase the pertinence of such research and the weight of applied literature in fleshing out the psychological problems and the ways to recovery in difficult times in life.

Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

The definition of trauma has changed and developed over time based on the context in which it is being examined. According to many modern trauma theorists, the traumatic encounter leaves a permanent impression on the psyche. These traumatic memories are assumed to be kept separate from the patient’s regular schematic memory, in an unchanged state (Piers, 1996). Judith Herman, the American psychiatrist, is most recognized for her contributions to the study of

traumatic stress and its victims (Marzillier, 2017, p. 302). She defines trauma as “an affliction of the powerless” (p. 33). In her prominent book *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman reveals that the horror and powerlessness are the dominant forces for the occurrence of possible post-traumatic disorders in the survivors of the battles, rapes, concentration camps, and domestic abuse (Moran, 1994). Deploying Herman’s trauma theory and the concept of “post-traumatic stress disorder”, “disconnection”, and “recovery” to read *The Silver Star* offers helpful insights about Liz and Charlotte and their traumatic experiences in life. In fact, these concepts can be examined in Walls’s all other works, which are dealing with personal and social difficulties in life.

As previously mentioned, the overwhelming traumatic experiences affect individuals’ psyche and life, which results in subsequent disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder. According to Ford (2009), “PTSD is one of the two psychiatric diagnoses that require that the person has experienced stressful events in addition to having distressing symptoms and problems in functioning” (p. 3). Meanwhile, Wilson (2006) argues that “avoidance behaviors, denial, disavowal, amnesia, blocking, forgetting, repression, and mistrust of others are all part of the natural history of PTSD” (p. 60). It is important to note that the existence and intensity of these symptoms are not equal for everyone for the reason that each individual’s reaction to threat is complex (Herman, 2015). Therefore, the symptoms also vary based on numerous criteria.

Symptoms of PTSD

Herman introduces three main symptoms of PTSD, including “hyperarousal”, “intrusion”, and “constriction”. The First symptom is a state of persistent alertness against being hurt by another traumatic experience (Krippner et al., 2012). In fact, “hyperarousal reflects the persistent expectation of danger” (Herman, 2015, p. 35). Therefore, the survivor constantly shows strong reactions toward possible stimuli of past traumatic events. These reactions vary according to the individual’s resistance and defense mechanism. Similarly, Wolfe et al. (2008) claim that this symptom shows the “alarm” stage after the traumatic experience. Intrusion is the next symptom of PTSD, which “reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment” (Herman, 2015, p. 35). Long after the traumatic event, its memories haunt the survivors and disrupt the normal development of their lives. Herman (2015) explains this symptom as the experience of trauma changes to an unusual type of memory which interrupts the consciousness both as flashback and nightmares while being awake and asleep. These memories demonstrate the endurance of certain thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to the traumatic experience (Friedman, 2015).

Constriction is introduced as the third symptom of PTSD, which is “the numbing response of surrender” (Herman, 2015, p. 35). The traumatized people may constantly constrict and limit themselves to avoid the traumatic experience. Valdez and Lilly (2012) argue that “emotional constriction has also been associated with PTSD, as emotional inhibition is a key characteristic of this disorder” (p. 87). Even though constriction can be considered some divine mercy that helps the traumatized person overcome the harsh feelings of trauma, it can also narrow down the social

activities of survivors and result in disconnection. Accordingly, Lansky (2000) argues that the defense mechanism of patients, who have experienced rape and violence and bear a sense of shame and guilt, forces them to withdraw from close relationships and constrict their social activities. In what follows, we examine the symptoms of PTSD including hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction in Charlotte and Liz.

In connection with Charlotte's case, her severe reactions toward her daughters' distrust in her reveal the existence of hyperarousal symptom. After introducing her imaginary perfect partner, Mark Parker, Charlotte states that Mark does not like to meet the girls because he envies their mother's attention toward them. This excuse raises a sense of suspicion in Liz and Bean, as Bean says, "he's too good to be true" (Walls, 2013, p. 13). Bean's expression of a slight sense of distrust in Charlotte evokes an aggressive reaction from her: "Do you think I'm making it all up? ... Screw you!" (Walls, 2013, p. 13). She adds: "Mom shouted. She was on her feet and started yelling about everything she'd done for me and Liz, how hard she'd struggled, how much she'd sacrificed, what an ungrateful couple of parasites we were" (Walls, 2013, p. 13). This harsh reaction toward Bean's statement represents Charlotte's hyperarousal symptoms as Krippner et al. (2012) mention that the common responses of hyperarousal are "quick startle responses such as becoming angry, anxious, or fearful" (p. 91). However, this is not the only occasion that shows Charlotte's "hyperarousal".

Charlotte's hyperarousal is also depicted in a conversation between her and her brother Tinsley when she returns to her hometown. Uncle Tinsley, who is aware of the girls' and Charlotte's unstable living condition, asks her sister "to give these girls some stability" (Walls, 2013, p. 82). He criticizes Charlotte, stating, "I do know if Martha and I had been blessed enough to have children, we never would have gone off and left them" (Walls, 2013, p. 82). This criticism makes Charlotte irritated. Bean describes Charlotte thus:

When anyone criticized Mom, she went on the attack, and that was what she did now. She was raising two daughters completely on her own, she said, and they were turning out darned well ... He'd never even had the wherewithal to get the hell out of Byler, and she had not come back to this godforsaken place to answer to him. (Walls, 2013, p. 82)

Zaleski et al. (2016) state, "[the] state of hyperarousal can be witnessed in trauma victims who exhibit a low frustration tolerance, are quick to anger or find themselves waking in the middle of the night at the slightest sound in their environment" (p. 379). Similarly, her brother's advice can be considered as a past traumatic stimulus that provokes an extreme response.

Likewise, the children's distrust in Charlotte after an argument about Mark Parker causes the intrusion of Charlotte's traumatic memories. Bean's description of her mother's reaction is telling in this regard:

I tried to calm Mom down, but that made her angrier. She never should have had kids, she went on, especially me. I was a mistake. She'd thrown away her

life and her career for us, run through her inheritance for us, and we didn't even appreciate it. (Walls, 2013, p. 13)

Charlotte remembers all her past traumatic experiences as the trivial reminders of trauma can also remind the memories of the traumatic event with all of its forceful feelings and clarity (Herman, 2015). Thus, she blames others as a normal defense mechanism to get out of this intrusion and the sense of inferiority and guilt out of past traumatic experiences.

Moreover, Charlotte's escape from Byler suggests that she constricts herself from her past to reduce the symptoms of PTSD. She has left Byler after Charlie's death to avoid any reminders of the trauma. Therefore, by returning to her hometown, Charlotte relives her memories after twelve years of being away. As she states, "being back here is all too dark and strange" (Walls, 2013, p. 81). Accordingly, Herman (2015) argues that "[the] voluntary suppression of thoughts related to the traumatic event is characteristic of traumatized people, as are the less conscious forms of dissociation" (p. 46). This remembrance intrudes upon her and causes intense feelings and breakdowns. Thus, she tries to escape from memories and constrict herself by leaving the town and pretending that nothing has happened. She tries to overcome her sense of inferiority by escaping from her memories and condition and also by constricting herself.

Regarding Liz's psychological condition, she also bears the symptoms of PTSD. However, the intensity of these symptoms is less than Charlotte's case. The fear of the returning of the traumatic moment results in the intrusion of the past memories and an overwhelming feeling in Liz. After the traumatic event, Liz and Bean decide to sue Maddox despite Uncle Tinsley's disapproval. While talking with a lawyer about the Maddox case, Bean suggests the possibility of the reoccurrence of the traumatic event, saying: "he might do it again" (Walls, 2013, p. 198). This raises a sense of fear in Liz and she speaks for the first time about the experience, asking whether it can happen again or not. Accordingly, Herman (2015), while describing the first symptom of PTSD, claims that "after a traumatic experience, the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment" (p. 35). This idea constructs the baseline for the symptom of intrusion. Similarly, Liz becomes nervous about the return of the traumatic moment as she asks, "Do you think he'd try it again?" (Walls, 2013, p. 198). She thinks that the traumatic event will happen again, and she just wants to be sure that she will not be in that condition once again. Bean mentions that the possibility of the event's reoccurrence is the only thing that attracts Liz's attention in the lawyer's office. It shows how the return of trauma affects the survivor after the occurrence of the traumatic event.

Similarly, Liz's reluctance to be examined by the doctor after the event reveals that she is trying to constrict herself and escape from the memories of trauma. As mentioned previously, Liz and Bean are working for Maddox to earn money for their costs. Maddox, who has created a bank account for Liz, deposits all her money there. When Liz asks for her money to buy a guitar, Maddox does not return the money. Liz faces violence and rape in a struggle to get her money back.

For sure, it is not a normal event happening to a fifteen year old girl. As a result of this traumatic experience, she is shocked and does not want to return to the moment of violence with Maddox. Accordingly, Herman (2015) mentions that “reliving a traumatic experience, whether in the form of intrusive memories, dreams, or actions, carries with it the emotional intensity of the original event” (p. 42). Thus, the traumatized person avoids reliving the traumatic memory. Similarly, Liz does not want to talk about or relive the event, saying, “I don’t want to talk about it” and “I don’t want anyone examining me” (Walls, 2013, p. 190). Indeed, it is not easy for Liz to overcome the intense feelings of fear and helplessness of the traumatic experience.

In a similar vein, Liz’s escape from social activities suggests that she does not want to face any reminders of trauma in the town. After the traumatic experience with Maddox, Liz tries to avoid showing up at school or anywhere and prefers to stay home. She is escaping from any kind of reminder of trauma in society. She just wants to stay home to delete the entire event from her life even though it is not a proper way to deal with the issue. Herman (2015) well elaborates on this aspect of constriction as this symptom affects thought, consciousness and memory, it can also limit the actions and life of survivors in their attempt to create safety. Likewise, Liz tries to create a sense of safety and control her situation by avoiding society’s reaction toward the event. Therefore, she cannot simply participate in social activities as a result of traumatic memory.

Disconnection

The primary effect of trauma that comes after the event is “disconnection”, which can be considered as a result of constriction. Wilson et al. (2006) correctly point out that the survivors of trauma usually feel disconnected from others and cannot create a sense of trust; so they cannot live a controllable life either. Similarly, Herman (2015) explains the concept of disconnection thus:

Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter, a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to the most abstract affiliations of community and religion. (p. 35)

Therefore, trauma has the power to disconnect individuals from society and their close relationships as it is evident in Charlotte’s and Liz’s disconnections from others. It is important to note that the constriction is one of the primary reasons for people’s disconnection from society.

For instance, Charlotte’s absence for a long time after the argument with her daughters about Mark Parker suggests that she disconnects herself from them to gain her lost autonomy. After the argument, Charlotte leaves the house for a long time. Charlotte writes a letter for her daughters before leaving them which reads as follows:

It’s 3 a.m. and I’m writing from a hotel in San Diego. I knew I have not been at the top of my game recently, and to finish my songs—and be the mother I

want to be—I need to make some time and space for myself. I need to find the magic again. I also pray for balance. (Walls, 2013, p. 18)

Writing to “be the mother I want to be” represents Charlotte’s guilty feelings toward herself and her daughters. Accordingly, Herman (2015) states that “trauma forces the survivor to relive all her earlier struggles over autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy” (p. 52). Thus, the mentioned argument forces Charlotte to live the past experiences again and remember her failure in gaining autonomy.

Moreover, the lack of enough support from family members results in Charlotte’s disconnection. When Charlotte separates from Liz’s father, she “expect[s] to be supported” (Walls, 2013, p. 74). Tinsley knows that Charlotte needs support after her separation, but neither he nor other family members assist her the way she needs. This lack of enough support from family members intensifies Charlotte’s feeling of helplessness. Herman (2015) is right to argue that “supportive responses from those closest to the survivor can detoxify her sense of shame, stigma, and defilement” (pp. 67-68). So, Charlotte, who does not receive this support, continues her life with the hope of finding it somewhere else. She disconnects herself from family and all the other people in Byler to find real hope and support.

Interestingly, despite Charlotte’s disconnecting herself from her children, she desperately looks for a supportive response to overcome her PTSD symptoms. In the hotel, a doctor comes to visit Charlotte. She describes her situation to the doctor thus: “No one understands how hard it is to be me” (Walls, 2013, p. 95); this sentence shows how lonely she is and how desperately she seeks help from others. After the doctor’s examination, Charlotte “closed her eyes and squeezed the doctor’s hand” (Walls, 2013, p. 95). Herman (2015) elaborates on this contradictory response from those suffering from traumatic experiences stating that “trauma impels people both to withdraw from close relationships and to seek them desperately ... The traumatized person therefore frequently alternates between isolation and anxious clinging to others” (p. 56). Accordingly, Charlotte, who has separated herself from her parents and brother before, separates herself from her children as well. She does not want to return to her traumatic moments and the feelings of inferiority and loss. However, she desperately looks for supportive people and relationships.

Similarly, people’s reaction toward Liz’s traumatic experience with Maddox shows that she has not been able to receive support from society immediately after the event. The lack of enough social support results in her disconnection from society and others. After suing Maddox, some people, especially those who are working for him, do not accept Liz’s experience of Maddox’s, assault out of the fear of losing their jobs. Similarly, Herman (2015) explains that the offender’s and victim’s position in a shared society has an important impact on receiving support from others:

In most instances of rape, for example, the offender is known to the victim: he is an acquaintance, a work associate, a family friend, a husband, or a lover. Moreover, the rapist often enjoys higher status than his victim within their shared community. The people closest to the victim will not necessarily

rally to her aid; in fact, her community may be more supportive to the offender than to her. To escape the rapist, the victim may have to withdraw from some part of her social world. She may find herself driven out of a school, a job, or a peer group. (p. 62)

Herman's explanation holds true for Liz's case; in Byler, everyone knows Maddox and many people work for him. Therefore, some people testify untruthfully against the victim to keep their job like Wayne Clemmons, the car driver, who witnessed the event. Even some girls at school humiliate and blame Liz for the untrue story. This kind of social reaction is against the victim and causes her to find the world untrustworthy. As a result of distrust in the safety of the world and the members of society, Liz deprives herself from social activities and disconnects herself from others.

Recovery Process and the Role of Social Support

Herman (2015) introduces three main stages for recovery process, which are "establishing safety", "remembrance and mourning", and "reconnection" with the normal course of life (p. 155). Traumatized people do not feel a sense of safety in their bodies, because "trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control" (Herman, 2015, pp. 159-160). Therefore, establishing safety can be considered as the most important stage as Joan A. Turkus (1994) argues that there is a remarkable attention on the stage of establishing safety and its maintenance during the recovery process. Similarly, the second stage, which is remembrance and mourning should occur by reconstructing the trauma story in detail and mourning the traumatic loss. Finally, reconnection will happen when the traumatized person learns to fight and get reconciled with herself and reconnect with others.

Following the mentioned explanation regarding the concept of recovery, Charlotte and Liz both try to progress in the recovery process after their traumatic experiences. However, their developments in these stages vary; Herman (2015) explains, "the course of recovery does not follow a simple progression but often detours and doubles back, reviewing issues that have already been addressed many times in order to deepen and expand the survivor's integration of the meaning of her experience" (p. 213). To start the recovery process, the traumatized people should regain their trust in the safety of the world. Herman (2015) highlights the significance of establishing safety as the progress in the other stages of recovery will not succeed in its absence. The second stage of recovery process is remembrance and mourning, where "the survivor tells the story of the trauma. She tells it completely, in-depth and in detail" (Herman, 2015, p.175). The survivor can progress in this stage through reconstructing the story, transforming traumatic memory, and mourning the traumatic loss. Jirek (2016) is right to argue that the narration of the traumatic experience seems to be a significant part of recovery process; however, for the reconstruction of a trauma story to be effective, the narration should be accompanied by the overwhelming feelings caused by trauma (Herman, 2015, p. 177).

The last stage is reconnection. Herman (2015) argues that after finishing the second stage of recovery,

[the survivor] is ready to incorporate the lessons of her traumatic experience into her life. She is ready to take concrete steps to increase her sense of power and control, to protect herself against future danger, and to deepen her alliances with those whom she has learned to trust. (p. 197)

She also states that as the survivors must overcome their fears, they should also master the possible social difficulties in their lives; otherwise, they may reexperience the traumatic experience in other symbolic forms. This idea emphasizes the significance of social connections in the recovery process. The following part discusses Charlotte's and Liz's attempts in establishing safety and their progress in the recovery process of PTSD.

Charlotte's departure from her hometown reveals that she escapes from the traumatic events of her life to establish safety. Charlotte, who is under the influence of her past traumatic memories, including separating from her husband and Charlie's death, leaves Byler to establish a safe environment. Bean narrates that "after a fight with her family, Mom decided to leave home in the middle of the night, taking us with her" (Walls, 2013, p. 1). However, despite escaping from the reminders of the traumatic events in Byler, Charlotte cannot establish a safe environment because, according to Herman (2015), "establishing a safe environment requires not only the mobilization of caring people but also the development of a plan for future protection" (p. 164). Therefore, it can be understood from the passage that Charlotte cannot establish a safe environment as she does not have any prepared plan for her future. Moreover, she cannot progress in the first stage as she is alone in the process of recovery.

The lack of social support also intensifies Charlotte's intrusive symptoms, which disrupts her from developing in the very first stages of recovery. After all the time Charlotte spends in Byler and the memories she recalls during her stay, she still cannot restore the sense of safety. Accordingly, Charlotte, who feels unsafe in Byler refuses to accept living there despite the children's decisions about staying, stating, "I can't stay here" (Walls, 2013, p. 281). When Charlotte refuses to stay in Byler with the girls, Bean becomes furious and says: "we wouldn't be in this whole mess if you had been acting like a mom all along" (Walls, 2013, p. 272). Bean's reaction to Charlotte's refusal to stay in Byler intensifies her guilty feeling as she states that "she tried to be a good mother ... but it was so hard. She didn't know what to do or where to go" (Walls, 2013, p. 272). In this respect, Haglund et al. (2007) argue that "social support can reduce risk taking behavior, encourage active coping, decrease loneliness, increase feelings of self-worth, and help a person put problems into perspective. A lack of social support correlates with depression, stress, and increased morbidity and mortality" (p. 29). Thus, Charlotte, who is dealing with her overwhelming past experiences cannot advance in recovery process without others' assistance. Ultimately, considering Charlotte's intrusive symptoms, it can be understood that she is unable to progress in the first stage of recovery and establish safety. Thus, her attempts to progress in the next stages will be futile.

Charlotte's reluctance to narrate memories of her past suggests that she is not capable of moving forward in the second stage of recovery, which is remembrance

and mourning the traumatic loss. While in Byler, Uncle Tinsley asks the girls whether Charlotte has ever talked about her family and past to which Liz responds: “It wasn’t Mom’s favorite subject” (Walls, 2013, p. 53). This indicates Charlotte does not want to remember and mourn her past traumatic experiences in Byler. As mentioned before, reconstructing and narrating the story of trauma is necessary for the process of recovery. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that a narration without feeling and imagination of the traumatic experience is not a practical way to proceed in recovery process (Herman, 2015). Therefore, the narration of traumatic memories should be detailed with all the sensations during the event. In Charlotte’s case, she refuses to narrate all the details as Bean reports: “Mom didn’t talk much about either Liz’s dad or my dad” (Walls, 2013, p. 60). Sometimes, she even lies about her past; for example, she lies about Charlie’s death saying: “He died in a mill accident before [Bean] was born” (Walls, 2013, p. 61). Thus, Charlotte cannot also progress in the second stage, because she is reluctant about remembering and mourning her traumatic memories.

Similarly, Charlotte’s harsh reaction toward Tinsley’s criticism about her motherhood suggests that she is not successful in reconciling with herself in the last stage of recovery. When Tinsley criticizes Charlotte, saying: “How could you go off and leave these kids alone?”, she tries to defend herself by asking him not to pass judgment on her to avoid facing her traumatic memories (Walls, 2013, p. 80). Despite Charlotte’s endeavors to overcome her PTSD, including staying away from the source of her disorder, following her dreams, joining Buddhist sessions, and returning to Byler, she is unable to progress in the recovery process. The symptoms of the traumatic past show themselves in a way that Charlotte cannot reconcile with herself to progress in the last stage. In this regard, Herman (2015) mentions that “gaining possession of oneself often requires repudiating those aspects of the self that were imposed by the trauma” (p. 203). Thus, Charlotte, who has not developed in the first stages of recovery, is unable to progress in reconciling with herself in the third stage as well.

In contrast to Charlotte’s case, Liz’s stay in the house for a short time after the event reveals that she has established a safe environment at home with her supportive family. Bean narrates, “Liz stayed home all winter with Mom” (Walls, 2013, p. 242), and did not go to school. Charlotte is also a great support for Liz as Bean says, “Liz clung to Mom and to her words, and Mom clearly enjoyed being clung to. They composed poetry together and finished each other’s sentences” (Walls, 2013, p. 238). Likewise, when Liz is hearing some voices in her head, mom supports her saying: “Don’t be afraid of your dark places,” and “if you can shine a light on them, you’ll find treasure there” (Walls, 2013, p. 239). Staying home with her mother and receiving support allow Liz to construct her sense of trust once again and establish a safe environment at home. After finding her safe environment at home, Liz feels ready to join bigger communities and society. As Herman (2015) mentions, once the survivor establishes safety, she can gradually increase her range of activities and participate in society. Therefore, it can be understood that Liz has been successful in the process of establishing safety with the support she receives from her family.

In a similar vein, Bean's aunt helping Liz to establish safety suggests that the survivor can progress in this stage by receiving help not only from the family members but also from society. For example, Aunt Al's telling Liz that she believes "every word of [her] story" strengthens Liz's sense of trust in others (Walls, 2013, p. 212). Aunt Al also clarifies the reason that some people in town are unfair about Liz's traumatic experience with Maddox, stating that "they were scared. They had jobs they couldn't afford to lose, and they didn't want to take sides against Jerry Maddox. But they were all too happy to see someone else stand up to him" (Walls, 2013, pp. 211-212). This utterance also develops a sense of trust in the safety of people and the world. Accordingly, Ruch and Leon (1986) mention that the "social support from personal networks or from treatment center personnel should be especially critical for rape victims to buffer the stress" (p. 144). Thus, all the support from relatives and friends enables Liz to establish safety and move forward in the other stages of recovery.

In addition, Liz's grief for Maddox's death reveals that she has mourned her past traumatic experience and even feels compassion for his children. After hearing about Maddox's death at the end of the story, Liz becomes sad and worries for her children: "What about Doris and the kids? What about the new baby?" and "those kids don't have a dad anymore" (Walls, 2013, p. 301). Accordingly, Herman (2015) explains the way the survivor heals and mourns her traumatic experience, stating that:

The survivor's healing depends on the discovery of restorative love in her own life; it does not require that this love be extended to the perpetrator. Once the survivor has mourned the traumatic event, she may be surprised to discover how uninteresting the perpetrator has become to her and how little concern she feels for his fate. She may even feel sorrow and compassion for him, but this disengaged feeling is not the same as forgiveness. (p. 190)

As is said, once the survivor has solved the issues with the event, she can show compassion toward the perpetrator. This represents that Liz has coped with the past traumatic event with Maddox, moved forward in the recovery process, and now she is capable of showing sorrow toward his children, who have to live without their father.

Furthermore, Liz's getting out of home after the event implies that she has managed to reconcile with herself and can progress in the last stage of recovery. She becomes able to return to school and continue the activities that she likes. Bean describes Liz's mental condition after returning to school thus:

When Liz returned to school, it had been a week since the trial, and I hoped the other kids would stop teasing her and move on to something else. They didn't completely, but Liz developed a way of dealing with it. She drifted through the hallways in her own world, as if no one else existed, and after school she played her guitar and worked late into the evening on her emu poetry. She also drew illustrations—emus reading newspapers, emus blowing their noses, emus playing saxophones. (Walls, 2013, p. 283)

Liz, who has established safety, now is able to reconcile with herself through the assistance she receives from her family. Her mental condition after the event

shows that she is capable of recreating her ideal self and life by “active exercise of imagination and fantasy, capacities that have now been liberated” (Herman, 2015, p. 202). In this regard, Herman (2015) also states that “[the survivor] has some understanding of the person she used to be and of the damage done to that person by the traumatic event. Her task now is to become the person she wants to be” (p. 202). Similarly, it can be understood that Liz has managed to reconcile with herself and progress in the last stage of recovery as well.

Liz’s participation in poetry writing classes reveals that she has managed to reconcile with herself and connect to others. Liz, who is interested in reading and writing poems, composes some poetry. However, “Liz was terrified to show her poetry to anyone except family. If someone criticized her writing, she’d be crushed” (Walls, 2013, p. 283). Therefore, Bean takes a copy of the poems to present to Miss Jarvis’s poetry classroom. Bean’s action causes Liz to participate in other communities at school and start to plan for her future. As Bean narrates, “Liz had felt like such a scorned outsider at Byler that she hadn’t realized the school had other outsiders as well. Discovering them was a real revelation” (Walls, 2013, p. 284). Accordingly, Jirek (2016) argues that to progress in the last stage of recovery, social support and connection to the supportive people are significant, because “most traumas are social problems, are the result of social inequalities, are experienced in socially patterned ways, and must be addressed at the level of social structures, institutions, and policies” (p. 18). This stage constructs an important part of traumatized person’s personality after the traumatic past. Thus, it can be concluded that Liz is also able to participate in larger communities, without fearing the intrusive memories of her traumatic experience.

Bean gives Charlie’s Silver Star medal to Liz at the end of the novel to highlight the significance of having supportive people in the difficult moments of life to progress in the recovery process after traumatic experiences. According to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the Silver Star is “a U.S. military decoration awarded for gallantry in action”. Similarly, Bean wants to support and appreciate her family, especially Liz, by giving her the medal:

Liz certainly had [the right to put on the medal], not just for everything she’d gone through but for protecting her kid sister from their mother’s wackiness until I was old enough to handle it. So had Uncle Clarence, not just for shooting Maddox but for taking on the work of a man when he was only a boy so that my dad would have a home. So had Aunt Al, for breathing in lint every night at the mill and then going home to care for her sick husband and her special little Earl. So had Uncle Tinsley, for taking in his two wayward nieces, and Mom, for coming back to a place she hated, to be there for Liz. All I’d done was get into a fight with Lisa Saunders and backtalk Miss Clay. (Walls, 2013, p.302)

The Silver Star highlights the importance of having a supportive family and community in overcoming the hardship of life and one’s traumatic past. In this respect, Baxter and Diehl (1998) argue that even though the survivors may still have their symptoms, they have managed to overcome the symptoms with others’

assistance and they are capable of continuing their social lives. This reminds one of Herman's emphasizing the significant role of social support in the recovery process of traumatic disorders.

Conclusion

The application of Judith Herman's psychological trauma theory to *The Silver Star* highlights its psychological aspects. The findings reveal that Charlotte and Liz both bear the symptoms of PTSD despite the differences in the type of their experienced trauma. Following the traumatic experiences and the aftermath symptoms, Charlotte and Liz, show the introduced symptoms of PTSD. They also disconnect themselves from their close relationships and society to reduce the post-traumatic effects on their psyche. In addition, Herman introduces three stages of the recovery process, where establishing safety is considered the most important stage. Accordingly, Charlotte, who fails to establish a safe environment in the absence of others' support, cannot progress in the stages of recovery. In contrast, Liz can receive enough support from family members and friends to establish a safe environment. Therefore, she can mourn and overcome her losses after the event and reconnect with others to have a normal course of life. Therefore, Liz becomes able to progress in the recovery process. Indeed, social support is represented as the most influential element in the recovery process of post-traumatic stress disorder in *The Silver Star*.

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