

The Manifestation of PTSD in Bill Cain's 9 Circles

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Abstract :

This study explores the notion of trauma in Bill Cain's 9 Circles. It seeks to highlight the severity of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the character Reeves and how it impacts his life and his behavior. The symptoms of PTSD in Reeves' case, along with how it develops and alters his social life and mental wellbeing, will be depicted in the research, by applying Caruth's literary trauma theory and Morrissey's criteria for the traumatized voice. The study will explore PTSD symptoms and the link between memory studies, trauma, and The War on Terror's impact on Reeves. The article will also examine how the stage unites language and performance to comprehend complex psychological issues in literature. This will create an emphatic reaction in the audience, emphasizing the importance of divulging in a literary perspective.

Key terms: (PTSD, Trauma, Memory Studies, The Other, Caruth).

Introduction

Mental health is a growing concern in the modern world. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was formally recognized and discussed in the medical field in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Previously, it was known as "shell shock"

¹ because of its occurrence in soldiers during times of war. In the aftermath of World War II, studies conducted by psychologists on veterans found a surprising number of them displaying symptoms of PTSD. After its introduction to psychology, PTSD acquired popularity in other mediums, such as film and literature. PTSD features in a variety of literary genres, being used in themes of war literature, science-fiction, fantasy, historical fiction, and other works. For example, novels such as Patricia Cornwell's Postmortem

(1990) and Orson Scott Card's Ender's Game (1985) delve into post traumatic landscapes from different angles. PTSD is an important theme in literature because of its prevalence and the struggles it can cause for those it affects. This began the popularity of incorporating the traumatized voice in literature. Literary trauma theory was introduced and popularized by Cathy Caruth (1996) in her book Unclaimed Experiences. It impacted the transition of trauma theory from psychology to literature. Trauma theory discusses the intersection of literature and psychology, and it has become a popular topic in the realm of literary analysis and criticism in recent years. This surge of interest has been driven by psychological research into the traumatizing effects of certain kinds of traumatic experiences. Trauma theory seeks to examine how people's responses to extreme situations, such as warfare, rape, natural disasters, and other forms of violence, have shaped the narratives in literature and art. While literature's major purpose is to entertain, by exploring trauma theory in literature, readers can come to terms with the trauma-inducing events that have impacted their lives, and those of their ancestors.

In her Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History (1996), Caruth pioneered the concept of traumatic reading. She argued that, when reading a text, a person's experience is further influenced by their experience of reading the work itself². This concept allows for a more expansive understanding of the literary text and its impact on our psychology. Caruth further argued that a text's source of trauma is not only contained within the words of the text but also in its structure and the way the text affects the reader³. She extended this idea by claiming that any text that is associated with trauma can have a powerful impact on the reader, regardless of the reader's experience of the trauma itself. Caruth's pioneering work on literary trauma theory and traumatic reading expands on psychology's representation of trauma⁴. Furthermore, as she edited Trauma: Explorations in Memory (1996), Caruth challenged the traditional view of trauma as something separate from normal life. She argues that trauma becomes a part of life and has a negative effect

only when untreated or not properly understood. This model of understanding trauma as a notion that is both present and active in the present moment has led to a greater level of understanding and apprehension of the experience of trauma. Her insight into how language and experience are connected has enabled a greater level of understanding of how trauma can be experienced and coped with.

As we delve into the psyche of individuals and how PTSD encapsulates their lives, trauma can be fleeting in time, but remains a daily struggle for the survivors. As their thoughts revolve around a certain time, a certain place, and an experience. Highlighting the dissociation trauma creates between an individual and society, memories that are suppressed can resurface through hallucinations, disassociation, and repetition, leaving the body emotionless. The complicated struggle between

PTSD and war are explored in different studies. For example, in Landscapes of Trauma: the Psychology of the Battlefield (2020), Hunt discusses trauma and war and how trauma was evident in the early battles, dating from The British Civil War. Thus, with its inclusion in the field of psychology, a surge in the subject of trauma appeared in contemporary literature, especially in fiction and theater after the 2003 Iraq War. Trauma and war were the subjects discussed avidly in theater post-2003. Such topics became prominent in literature to portray the consequences of war. One such work is Bill Cain's 9 Circles.

The 9 Circles is inspired by the story of an American troop Steven Dale Green. Green was discharged with a "personality disorder" before federal charges were brought on to him. Prosecutors sought a death sentence, and a federal jury in Paducah, Ky, was convened on charges covering the rape and murder of 14-year-old Abeer Qassim Al-Ajnabi and murder of her mother, father, and younger sister. Four other soldiers were convicted in a military court for various roles in the attack. Three remain in a military prison⁵. Green was challenging the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act, which allows the federal

government to charge an American soldier in a civilian court for alleged crimes committed overseas. He was the first soldier convicted under the statute. Green, a 19-year-old from Midland, Texas, enlisted in the Army after dropping out from high school. He asserted that enrolling was simple, motivated by a sense of duty to defend his nation. Green was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division, which is stationed in Fort Campbell. Also, upon landing in Iraq, Green said, his training was established on murder, the rampant violence around him, and nasty comments by other troops against Iraqis led to dehumanizing the country's civilian population ⁶.

9 Circles is a robust drama created by Bill Cain. The play explores a young an american soldier, Daniel Reeves, who is on trial for crimes committed during the Iraq War. The play, inspired by Dante's The Divine Comedy: Inferno, delves into the motifs of conflict, justice, and redemption. The thematic concern of redemption ⁷. Through a succession of emotional and thought-provoking moments, 9 Circles pushes viewers to confront the moral dilemmas of war and the detrimental consequences it has on individuals. The Play's representation of moral complexities generates the viewers empathy, rather than hate towards Reeves. As we accompany the antihero Reeves on his journey of purgation we become aware of his mental struggles. Cain's language in this play is profound, eliciting substantial discussions about the human cost of conflict.

This article will argue that PTSD causes Reeves's violence in 9 Circles, leading to his ultimate alienation from himself and society. Some critics have argued that Reeves' previous mental health struggles influenced his decision to commit murder and rape ⁸. However, this study will seek to prove that PTSD is the underlying cause of his violent conduct and his death. In the first section of the chapter, an analysis of Reeves' trauma and symptoms of PTSD will be conducted specifically focusing on his vivid imagination. Also, the first section will discuss memory studies and the War on Terror. Section two will analyze the stage and connect it to Dante's Inferno through intertextuality

and theater. The Chapter will also explore the significance of metalanguage and intertextuality.

The focus of this chapter will be to analyze PTSD is the principal reason for Reeves' dysfunctional personality and lack of societal isolation. This leads to the ultimate downfall of private Daniel Reeves. The DSM III presented the diagnosed symptoms, which include numbness of emotion, anger, hostility and avoidance symptoms. These symptoms are present in Reeves. Therefore, through the exploration of PTSD understanding individualized experiences and struggles.

PTSD in the character Reeves

On the stage, Reeves' trauma is removed from complex psychology to the empathetic field of literature. This creates an understanding of emotions and turmoil that Reeves goes through as they are seen onstage. Through vivid portrayals, theater delves into the personal struggles of each character, offering insights into the psyche of soldiers. Morrissey suggests certain symptoms of the traumatized voice can best be depicted in literature: these include fragmentation, repetition, hallucinations, and intertextuality⁹. These elements are manifested in 9 Circles and they indisputably depict PTSD in Reeves' character and actions. This section will argue that Reeves has PTSD, which leads to his committing his crimes. Primarily, the cause of Reeves' trauma will be examined; which is the death of Sergeant Ortiz and its impact on Reeves. As the discussion progresses, symptoms of PTSD evident in Reeves will be proven throughout his conversation with the Lieutenant and the young female lawyer. Evidently, the symptoms of PTSD are manifested in Reeves. This section will also argue that Reeves is dysfunctional in society and is incapable of socially surviving a normal life.

This section will trace the actual incident that created the trauma for Reeves. Undeniably war is traumatic; however, each soldier has gone through an experience that reshaped their

personality significantly. Regarding Reeves, his trauma is revealed in circle six. As he speaks to the shrink, he mentions the death of Sergeant Ortiz and how he was shot by a man smiling, which was painful for Reeves:

SHRINK. How about Sgt. Ortiz? What would he do if you told him you wanted to kill everybody?

REEVES He'd do what he always did. He'd put his hand out with a big smile. Like at the roadblock. He walked up to the car and he walked up to everybody. Even in Cammies and Kevlar, that's all you could see when he came up to you. A smile and his hand out. He had his daughter's name tattooed on his wrist so you could see that too. The guy in the car smiled back at him. Put his hand out. There was a gun in it. He shot him. Just like that. He shot Timmons too. Timmons fell down dead.

Sgt. Ortiz was alive. Most of the way. Looking at me. He never looked away. I never looked away from him. Never once. *(He holds his look at her for a while.)*

SHRINK. Did he say anything?

REEVES. No, ma'am. He was dignified. Never complained. Not a word.¹⁰ Reeves held the Sargent till he died. The way the Sergeant investigated Reeves' eyes shows the hope that Reeves was in search of. The relationship between Reeves and the Sargent created value within Reeves and it was with his death that the dreams he had cherished disappeared, leaving a young angered boy willing to kill everybody to act out his trauma. As he mentions the traits of the sergeant, he states that he liked jokes and Reeves tells some of these jokes to the shrink. The Sargent jokes make Reeves emotional. Thus, the shrink notices his trauma as in the following exchange:

(Silence.) (Reeves is about to cry.)

SHRINK. You didn't tell him a joke. *(Silence.)*

REEVES. I rubbed his chest. I said "Sgt. Ortiz." He died. And that's the trauma, right? SHRINK. If it bothered you, it is. REEVES. If it didn't bother me, it is too, right?

SHRINK. You're a smart guy.

REEVES. Nothing smart about it. It's a trick. You just say the opposite of what people say to you - it confuses them.¹¹

This is the moment in which Reeves discusses the death of the Sargent. While he was holding him, the Sergeant died. There were many conflicting moments in the scene which illustrate the traumatic impact of the event on Reeves as the Sargent was a highly respected person to Reeves. This is seen in the jokes he tells the shrink that he memorized from him¹². Reeves continues to retell the jokes even though the shrink does not show interest, suggesting the Sergeant's influence on him. He states, "That was my life. Not twenty years. Not ten months. Five minutes on a hummer hood. That was enough. Go like him. No words at all"¹³, which shows the intense connection Reeves has with Sargent.

By centralizing trauma, literary trauma theory seeks to bring an understanding and awareness to the audience about the difficulties individuals go through. According to Anne Whitehead, "In testing formal boundaries, trauma fiction seeks to foreground the nature and limitations of narrative and to convey the damaging and distorting impact of the traumatic event"¹⁴. Consequently, we set out to establish the foreground for analyzing PTSD in the character of Reeves. When Reeves is introduced to the audience, he tries to resist being discharged from the war. Circle one begins with the conversation between Reeves and the Lieutenant, which reveals to the audience that Reeves has PTSD. As he discusses death, he states that death does not bother him and believes that he should kill all the people who hate freedom in Iraq¹⁵. This projects his numbness of emotion and his malice towards the Iraqis. The numbness of emotions and his hostility are two of the prevalent symptoms of PTSD which are found in Reeves¹⁶. The numbness of emotion and hostility is exhibited in the following exchange:

REEVES. The basics, sir. Killing people. It bothers some people, sir.

LIEUTENANT. It doesn't bother you?

REEVES. Sir, we came here to kill people, sir.

LIEUTENANT. (Gung-ho.) Soldiers, we came here to help build a nation. That is our mission. Operation Iraqi Freedom.....

REEVES. (Gung-ho-er.) Sir, I don't mean we're here to kill all the people. Just the ones who hate freedom. Whoever is left when the killing stops - that's the nation.¹⁷

Thus, through the lines of Reeves, two symptoms of PTSD are projected. numbness of emotions and hostility, reinforcing the above-stated argument. These symptoms are entwined with memory. Through exploring trauma and its relation with memory, memory can be hindered and influenced by external factors. This triggered ongoing debates in memory studies. Memory studies is a discipline that investigates how memory functions, how it develops individual and community identities, and how it affects social and cultural processes. Memory studies investigates subjects like traumatic memory, collective memory, nostalgia, forgetting, and how memory is mediated and altered in a variety of contexts, including literature, film, politics, and digital media¹⁸. Sarah O'Brien¹⁹ draws upon the findings of prominent scholars of transnational memory studies and suggests that memory studies is a contemporary field, which divulges in the notion that memory does not issue from within. Rather, memory is constructed and does not involve subjective inner feelings, but traces a cultural and political trajectory²⁰. It seeks to depict the intricacies of memory and how social and political ideals construct memory in a certain way. Hence, in light of memory studies and associating it to PTSD, we can notice that Reeves' malice and indifference to killing does not come from within. Conversely, it reflects his cultural and political memory. transnational memory, is collective memory shared beyond national borders²¹. Through incorporating similar experiences or events that have impacted the identities of diverse nations or groups. In "Transnational Memory and the Construction of History through Mass Media", Aleida Assmann states that because of the various

developments that occur globally, there should be new modes in considering memory²². Assmann defines that cultural memory “grows over centuries as an interaction between uncontrolled, self-organizing bottom-up accretion and controlled top-down institutions that are “more or less independent of any particular political organization”²³. Assmann defines political memory as a memory that is in part instituted by the political establishment and how such mediums use mass media and versatile tools in shaping political views and memory.

Thus, drawing upon the American Memory and identity post 9/11, social and political memory impacted the perceptions of America and the West of the East, specifically Muslims. Political memory is interwoven with trauma from the attack on September 11. The West and Americans have not experienced war trauma or the terror of war. Consequently, the attack created a shock value within society, the loud bombings, and that no bodies that were found for burials created a collective traumatic state²⁴. Meek also remarks that the “construction of 9/11 as traumatic implicitly reaffirmed the moral legitimacy of the West”²⁵. The East was depicted as barbaric and demoralizing, while the West was portrayed as defending itself through warfare.

Muslim countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan were viewed as enemies by America, and Western countries used war as a scapegoat to protect themselves. The notion of the War on Terror and 9\11 became correlated with news outlets and political discussions. The War on Terror refers to the fighting against terrorism to save the West from the barbarity of the East²⁶. Through the use of cultural memory and mass media, certain political frameworks were ingrained in the minds and memory of Americans (Bond 2015, 10). Hence, the hatred instilled in the memory of Reeves creates a numbness of emotion and hatred toward Iraqis. As the events of 9/11 occurred during his teenage years, living in a conservative state, nationalism and defending your country were important notions. Therefore, the influence of that attack on Reeves’ political and social memory is seen in Reeves as he converses with

the young female lawyer in Circle 2 and states that nowhere near enough Iraqis were killed by him²⁷. Reeves' animosity toward Iraqis is evident in how he vividly describes shark-torn bodies or how he uses the couch metaphor to depict the harm caused to American soldiers during the war. His perspective on war casualties is shown in how he imagines the couch being shredded every time it rains because of the blood on it and the coyotes destroying it. However, such disturbing images are hard to imagine. If this was a book, many may have turned the pages, yet, as we watch the play, we are forced to listen to describing torn bodies which is normal for Reeves²⁸. Reeves' nonchalant attitude towards discussing traumatic issues reflects his mental instability and inability to fit into society because of PTSD. This is seen when Reeves compares mental and physical disabilities:

"REEVES. (*Torn between rage and sorrow.*)

So, you're telling me a guy who was torn to pieces - he can get back here and stay here - and you're telling me what's in here

WHAT'S - INSIDE - HERE

(*Fighting tears.*)

Is in WORSE SHAPE- than a guy who was TORN TO FUCKING PIECES BY A PACK OF DOGS AND A SHARK? Is that what you're telling me?

LIEUTENANT. No, son. Nobody's saying that. What's wrong with you - it might be something small. But whatever it is, they're saying is - it can't be fixed.²⁹

As Reeves reflects on physical injury in war, the manner of animosity is further reinforced by Reeves' outrage as a representation of PTSD symptoms. His anger towards a soldier's return to war with an injured leg is tied to his mental disorder, which hinders him from returning to battle due to his psychological state. This reflects the severity of mental disorders and how they impact one's life. While someone who is physically injured can

continue at war, this paradox depicts to the audience that PTSD impedes disability in the army.

As Reeves reflects on physical injury in war, the manner of animosity is further reinforced by Reeves' outrage representing PTSD symptoms. His anger about a soldier who is back to war with an injured leg while he cannot go back to war because of mental injury "what's in his head". Hence, due to the severity of Reeves' mental disorder, he cannot be at war. While someone who is physically injured can, this paradox depicts to the audience that PTSD impedes disability in the army.

PTSD symptoms that Reeves suffers from render him unable to function in society and his actions lead to his alienation from himself. However, one must comprehend the perspective of Reeves and understand the influence of cultural memory and political memory in shaping Reece's perception of the Iraqis. Undoubtedly, untreated mental illnesses create profound struggles in an individual which impacts daily functionality and societal integration. Various studies have depicted the struggles of veterans after the war, specifically the struggle of social integration³⁰. This is seen clearly in Reeves as the chapter has developed the representation of numbness of emotions and hostility within Reeves. We can now explore the effects of war and trauma on individuals; by applying Morrissey's "traumatized voice" criteria. Through the analysis, it will be revealed how Circle 2 represents Reeves' PTSD symptoms, including fragmentation, dissociation, and denial. Through the process of analysis and the portrayal of PTSD symptoms in the play, the correlation between PTSD and social survival will be built.

Reeves finds himself in a jail cell, unaware of the reason behind his confinement and with a fragmented memory. His demeanor apparently changed and it can be linked to PTSD. His attention is wholly on the car, disregarding the conversation.

Reeves' questioning of the crimes he faces and his inability to link his actions to Iraq or his present time contribute to depicting fragmentation and memory loss, which is seen when (YFL) comes to visit him in jail to help defend him in court.

"YFL. Listen this time.

One. On or about April 16, 2006, outside the United States, to wit, in Iraq - while a member of the United States Army REEVES. Wait ... Iraq?

(Yes.) Iraq?

(Very puzzled.)

I did not have my car in Iraq³¹

In the above conversation, fragmentation is perceived on stage, as Reeves cannot understand the crimes he committed. Additionally, the scene shifts to the courtroom, which showcases fragmentation in both narrative and setting³². Also, the scene highlights that his memory is distorted. One may suspect the reason may be because of intoxication. However, drawing on an interview with the actual soldier "Green" on which this play was based, he indicated in a news question that the events of battle affected his brain chemistry, which led to his acts "he had an altered state of mind"³³ : "I wasn't thinking about more than 10 minutes into the future at any given time I didn't care," Green stated³⁴. Referring to altered brain chemistry, PTSD's impact on the brain was studied thoroughly. PTSD creates a change in the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus³⁵; this is pivotal to note, as the prefrontal cortex regulates thoughts and emotions³⁶, while the hippocampus plays a major role in memory³⁷. This demonstrates that Reeves is affected by severe PTSD as he struggles in the play with memory loss and hostile emotions. The young female lawyer (YFL) asks Reeves questions, though he does not pay attention. In addition, the scenario transitions from the jail cell to the courtroom, resulting in a fractured atmosphere:

"(Reeves laughs out loud. Inappropriately.)

YFL. Be careful what you say tomorrow. Two words. "Not guilty," Mr. Reeves.

Not. REEVES. (Fuck you.) Two words. "HONORABLE - DISCHARGE." You think they give honorable discharges to people who

(A name is called - -)

VOICE (MAN.). Daniel Reeves.

VOICE. How do you plead?

Mr. Reeves - guilty or not guilty?

(YFL looks to Reeves. Nods.)

YFL. Mr. Reeves will not enter a plea at this time.

VOICE. Are you represented by counsel?

(No response.) Mr. Reeves?

(Reeves laughs inappropriately. Then -)

REEVES. Judge, do you think we went to the moon? ³⁸

The clear fragmentation above reinforces the above notion of memory and fragmentation. Such actions expressed by Reeves reinforce the argument that the atrocities committed by Reeves were because of PTSD. The scene reflects on impairing memory and fragmentation, which touches upon the critical framework of literary trauma theory.

An important factor in trauma theory is the dissociation from the psyche which is highlighted in Herman's Trauma and Recovery. As Herman puts it, "Dissociation appears to be the mechanism by which intense sensory and emotional experiences are disconnected from the social domain of language and memory, the internal mechanism by which terrorized people are silenced"³⁹. Accordingly, as Reeves is questioned about the subject of killing, he does not remember, and his memory is affected. Thus, PTSD and dissociation

are the triggers for Reeves' atrocities. That Reeves does not feel guilty about the crimes he committed, which shows his dissociation from the psyche. On the other hand, Robert Jay Lifton remarks on the traumatized self-reflect on the disassociation from the psyche, as she states:

In extreme trauma, one's sense of self is radically altered. There is a traumatized self that is created. Of course, it's not a new self, it's what one brought into the trauma as affected significantly and painfully, confusedly, but in a very primal way, by that trauma. And recovery from post-traumatic effects, or survivor conflicts, cannot occur until that traumatized self is reintegrated."⁴⁰

Through the analysis of Reeves, we view alienation, withdrawal, and lack of connection, which leads him to denial and dissociation from the psyche, which is seen when Reeves denies the crimes he commits.

REEVES. Do you think we did this? Is that what you think?

YFL. Terrible things happen.

REEVES. (Astounded.) YOU THINK WE -? We don't DO things LIKE THIS. Insurgents did this. We investigated it. That report - it's nothing but lies.

YFL Perhaps. Still, there is something to be learned from it.⁴¹

Denial in Reeves is interlaced with dissociation. This creates a pivotal aspect to analyze in trauma, when the traumatized denies or resists the truth. This corresponds to the ongoing struggle or suffering with mental health conditions when we analyze the case of Reeves' PTSD and personality disorder. According to Herman, "remembering no and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both to restore the social order and for the healing of individual victims"⁴². Thus, his denial of his crimes alludes to his continuous struggle with PTSD. This can be linked to the dissociation from the psyche by the correlation found between denial and dissociation. It is apparent that Reeves is undergoing

a continuous struggle with PTSD. The interactions that omit the traumatized voice depict to the audience the incapability of Reeves surviving a social life as he struggles from within, which leads to his ultimate alienation from himself.

By focusing on the symptoms of PTSD and gradually uncovering the source of Reeves' trauma, we can trace a link between social alienation and PTSD. This illustrates his rage and inability to manage his emotions. Even though Reeves is the perpetrator of violence, we the audience recognize his struggle and pain, which results in his crimes, showcasing how PTSD affects his perception of life, especially gender, and how he exercises his inferiority on those who are inferior to him. The fact that we sympathize with him highlights the power of theater. We understand his trauma and watch him suffer while also despising his crimes. Such complexity is difficult to represent in a narrative form; it is via this stage that we learn about trauma and PTSD, as well as how they impacted his life, leading to his social and personal demise.

The projection of PTSD on Stage and Through Intertextuality

Theater is a powerful tool for exploring the complexities of trauma and its impact on people's lives. Through stories, characters, and performances, audiences can witness the struggles, coping mechanisms, and healing processes of those who have PTSD. Further, tracing intertextuality in theater can further enrich these discoveries by referencing other works that deal with similar themes or situations, creating deeper levels of meaning and connection. Intertextuality in theater often involves references to past works, historical events, or cultural artifacts. PTSD has had a significant impact in the diagnosis of individuals in events, such as wars, conflicts, and natural disasters. Through creating parallels to these events, theater can show the lasting effects of trauma on individuals and communities across time and culture.

As the symptoms of PTSD are depicted in Reeves, this section will explore the stage and intertextuality and their vital interaction in projecting Reeves symptoms. Four important notions of the stage will be discussed including the vitality of the emblems on stage, the instances of nudity in the play, doubling on stage and its reflection of psyche, and stage language and its reflection of “The Other”. Then the discussion on intertextuality will examine the notions of companions and circle 6 in relation to canto 27, also divulging into intertextuality in relation to Shakespeare.

The stage effectively conveys examples of PTSD. The usage of emblems in each circle depicts significant components of Reeves’ life. In circle 8, he arranges each emblem around the army boots, forming a memorial cemetery.

Craig slowly gathered all the elements together as he spoke. He put the military boots down center and assembled the other items around the boots to create a soldier’s memorial grave. He then took the beer bottle and poured the imagined contents over the grave. It was a remarkable rehearsal moment and we kept it in the show.⁴³

The Boot symbolism it may remain unrecognized, even though the word “boots” is a metonym for soldiers, which reflects on how war clothing reflects masculinity “the predominant symbolism of boots has been masculine and militaristic”⁴⁴. This suggests the importance of the boots in reflecting the inner concerns of Reeves. Consequently, the emphasis on the Boots as a memorial grave stresses the impact of Reeves’ broken masculinity, which reflects on his actions leading to his own death. On stage, the intensity of the actions and setting allows us to see the complexity of trauma. Each element of the emblem memorial represents how it stripped away a part of Reeves’ personality, ultimately leading to his downfall.

Two incidents of nudity in the play represent contrasting philosophies, as unequivocally the stage adds immensely to their impact. The first was forced upon him when he stripped away from anything that belongs to the US army.

“Reeves checks the inside of his cap. It’s the government. He hurls it to the ground. Check his jacket. The governments. Damn! Hurls it to the ground. As transition music plays, he checks all of his clothes until he is naked on stage. As the uniform comes off, it’s almost as if Reeves loses his bone structure along with the clothes. And his will to live.”⁴⁵

Reeves, slumping down, symbolizes how PTSD destroys one’s self. Using the clothing of the US government in the play indicates that the character Reeves was created by the government, suggesting that the crimes committed by Reeves were not solely because of his own actions. This also feeds into his memory. It is deemed that Reeves' political memory shaped his ideas about the War on Terror and hatred towards the East. While, the second incident of nudity represents salvation; as Cain is a Jesuit priest, he aimed to convey the journey of redemption. The second example of nudity is Reeves’ acceptance of himself after reflecting on his sins and traumatic experiences.

“is the opposite of the first. Reeves is not forced into this moment. He is consciously preparing himself for what’s to come. This preparation gives a sense of the young man’s youth and utter vulnerability”⁴⁶

The intensity of the performance creates a stage with the power to leave a profound and lasting impact on the audience. Theater delivers an experience that cannot be described in words. Thus, it is through Reeves’ vulnerability that he becomes self-aware. He does not forgive himself but comes to terms with his destiny, confronting his mistakes and revealing himself as a young teen, not knowing the consequences of his actions.

In the production notes, Cain emphasizes the vitality of doubling on stage. According to Cain⁴⁷ doubling Reeves visitors in 9 Circles emphasizes Reeves’ singularity and implies

that the visitors are figments of his imagination, not real individuals. Using doubles in the play highlights Reeves' psychological journey towards redemption. Thus, the impact of hallucinations reflects the severity of PTSD, which alludes to the key point of contrasting drama to other mediums of literature. As such differences would not be viable in other forms of literature: it is through the stage that we become aware that Reeves is experiencing hallucinations. The people who visit him are not real; rather it only occurs in his psyche. This reinforces the idea that he struggles to function in society.

As we have explored the tangible notions of the stage, we will explore the influence of language in enhancing theatrical representation of 'The Other' in the play (Iraqis). In the play, 'The Other' is depicted through language rather than being actually present. It is through language that we grasp the view Reeves has of Iraqis. The concept of "The Other" acquired popularity through Edward Said's Orientalism. The book emphasizes how the East is portrayed within a western construct and created the foundation for postcolonial literary theory⁴⁸. The orient is portrayed when Reeves decides the death of Hayat; this is a clear representation of the orient being constructed by western influence. Through exploring "the Other" in news outlets after 9/11, the barrier between the East and the West is amplified. This is exemplified in the language of Reeves as he talks about Iraqis during his time back from war and the representation of Hayat.

As Reeves addresses the Iraqis, the manner in which he discusses them is depicting the other by using the words "them" and "us". While commenting through the play negatively on Iraqis. Such instance is seen when he suggests to the shrink that he wants to kill all Iraqis and he dehumanizes Iraqis, because one Iraqi killed a Sargent⁴⁹. Such comments remove individualization and create a barrier perpetuating binary divisions. Post-9/11 American cultural changes and the subsequent retaliation are intricately linked to Neo-Orientalism. Once again, the Middle East and the Orientalist discourse, which divides humans into "us" and "them," came into the spotlight.⁵⁰ After the 9/11 attacks and the

popularization of The War on Terror, the representation of Arabs as Neo-orientalist in literature has become more widespread in post-9/11 politics. Thus, terrorism emerged as the dominant label for reinforcing the dichotomy between the West and the East.

The comments on Hayat subject her to being a figment constructed by the views of the prosecutor and the American stance. Moreover, the audience is not provided with any accurate description of Hayat, only those who have not met her describe her; even the YFL comments on how it is documented that she is a woman instead of a young girl⁵¹, highlighting the contrast between individualism and an entity.

The use of metalanguage in the play⁵² represents how Reeves reflects on language serving as commentary on war. This discussion on language reflects on the orchestrated nature of war. The Iraqis were considered enemies, and weapons of mass destruction in Iraq were used as a pretext for the war in 2003. Thus, highlighting the theatrical aspect of war.⁵³ This depicts that on stage, language is crafted to fit the script. Thus, The War on Terror was crafted to justify reasons for the 2003 Iraq war.

The purpose of metalinguistic discourse in theater is to portray the accuracy of language in portraying reality.⁵⁴ The frustration of Reeves as he tries to find the correct literary technique to express how confused he is by Oxymorons and Euphemisms suggests the constructed nature of language. This further reinforces that the ideas we have from the play about the Iraqis and Hayat is through the language of Reeves only, who tends to disregard Iraqis. emphasizing the construct of “The Other” in the play. This portrays that reality is like the stage, everything is constructed to fit the script rather than happening naturally

Intertextuality is an essential element in portraying traumatized voices, as depicted in Cain’s incorporating Dante’s journey through purgatory. In Reeves’ journey, intertextuality is used to narrate his experience as he is detached from his mind, resulting in memory

inconsistencies. Dante relied on Virgil for counsel and warnings, while Reeves lacked such support. In contrast to Dante's journey in the Inferno, Reeves had no companion to guide him through death. This confirms that Reeves' psychological journey was a solitary one. According to the production notes, Circle 6 in the play represents Canto 27 of the Inferno. In this scene, Reeves has a flashback to a conversation with his therapist where he discusses traumatic events that he has been avoiding. This is similar to Dante's journey, where he prepares for his final purgatory before reaching Beatrice from pain to solace in Canto 27. Therefore, for Reeves to confront his horror, he must go through this process of facing his past, recounting his trauma to heal. According to Herman in trauma and recovery, one must detail and recount traumatic events to heal⁵⁵. Traumatic memories are often fragmented and unspoken, and literary and cultural texts might confront and process these events indirectly. Thus, intertextuality functions as a substitute to traumatic gaps which the character is incapable of retelling. We can gain insight and understanding into how trauma affects people and society by identifying and studying how traumatic experiences are depicted in various mediums of literature.⁵⁶

Through referencing Dante's Inferno, Cain could analyze the psychological consequences of trauma. Intertextuality can be observed through the comparison of Reeves and Dante, as they share similar experiences and psychological traits in different literary works. Contrasting Dante's persona with Reeves also adds depth to the depictions of PTSD and its aftermath on one's social life. By employing this approach, one can shed light on the numerous dimensions of meaning and context associated with depicting the intricacies of PTSD.

As we highlighted the direct intertextual reference to Dante's Inferno, intertextuality with canonical texts is vital to discuss to showcase its impact on Cain's work. Cain's work when analyzed is rounded with political references to Shakespeare's Play Macbeth as there are various references in Cain's work. This illustrates the roundness of Cain's work through

allusions to Macbeth which intertwines the works of Cain with each other as his play Equivocation is also a reference to Macbeth, since the play is based on King James I gunpowder plot which also inspired Shakespeare's play Macbeth⁵⁷. The title itself represents the language of the play and how Lady Macbeth and Macbeth use the language technique equivocation to conceal the death of King Duncan. In the famous TV series House of Cards, the character Frank Underwood is also a character reference to Macbeth. Similarly, Reeves' character shows signs of being influenced by Macbeth, which adds to the overall completeness of Cain's work. The study of classical works helps us grasp the recurring themes in literature and their global significance.

The overarching ambition of Reeves is like Macbeth, a young soldier driven by arrogance and scarred masculinity to murder for power. Macbeth believes in his fate to be king; yet, his belief in a prophecy of the three witches resonates with Reeves murdering Hayat. As he believes if he does not kill her, someone else will, showcasing that he is prophesying the fate of Hayat. Through intertextuality offered by Cain, the complex subtleties of the texts could be understood thoroughly as the audience connects to canonical works and their ideas which is emphasized in the works of Cain, specifically 9 circles.

Moreover, the references to the battle of Lepton and defeat appear as an intertextual reference to the theme of defeat in Macbeth. This represents the reappearing themes of murder and battles that end with defeat across the spectrum of literature and reality, contributing to the ever-evolving discussions on the strive for power and the complexities of war. Therefore, such allusions create a more complicit understanding in connecting superiority to trauma and defeat.

The significance of PTSD in theater stems from its potential to shed light on the intricacies of trauma and to increase knowledge and empathy. By investigating historical and cultural settings, it fosters an artistic discussion, and brings healing and catharsis for both creators

and spectators. Intertextuality enriches and deepens these discoveries by linking the present narrative to a larger network of cultural and creative references, broadening its scope and effect.

Conclusion

The study of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in theater, especially from the perspective of intertextuality, offers an invaluable opportunity to explore the intricacies of trauma and its wide-ranging effects. Theater provides a rich platform for understanding the long-term impact of PTSD on individuals and society by drawing parallels to past works, historical events, and cultural settings. Narratives, characters, and performances give audiences a chance to witness the struggles, coping mechanisms, and healing journeys of individuals with PTSD, fostering empathy, awareness, and connection. This is the exact cathartic reaction experienced by the audience viewing 9 Circles. In addition, theater can effectively emphasize the universal and timeless nature of trauma by connecting the stage to broader cultural narratives such as Dante's *Inferno* or collective trauma like The War on Terror. This article aimed to demonstrate how PTSD plays a significant role in shaping Reeves' experiences and behaviors, allowing viewers to connect with the subtle complexities of trauma in a relevant and impactful manner. This, in turn, affects the daily interactions of viewers; thus increasing their apprehension of complex issues.

¹ Sheena Eagon, "Emasculated by Trauma: A Social History of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Stigma and Masculinity," *Journal of American culture*. No35. (2012): 362.

² Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 6.

³ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 49-50.

⁴ Richter, David H., ed. *A Companion to Literary Theory*. Chichester, West Sussex, (UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2018), 362.

⁵ Brett Barrouquere, "Ex-Soldier Spared Death Sentence for Iraq Murders," *The Independent*, May 22, 2009, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/exsoldier-spared-death-sentence-for-iraq-murders-1689347.html> , (accessed 27/03/24.)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Sarah Saddler, Bill Cain's 9 Circles: Dramaturgically Re-Evaluating an American Understanding of Military and Individualism, 2013, 13.

⁸ 1. Philip H. Pollock, "When the Killer Suffers: Post-traumatic Stress Reactions Following Homicide," *Legal and Criminological Psychology* 4, no. 2 (September 1999): 185–202, <https://doi.org/10.1348/135532599167842>.

⁹ Ted Morrissey, and Robert L Mclaughlin, *Trauma Theory as an Approach to Analyzing Literary Texts: An Updated and Expanded Edition*, with Reading, (Illinois: Twelve Winters Press, 2021), 50–60.

¹⁰ Cain 9, Circles, 55.

¹¹ Cain 9, Circles, 54.

¹² Bill Cain, *9 Circles* (New York, New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2013) 55.

¹³ Cain, 9 Circles, 71.

¹⁴ Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*. (Edinburgh University Press, 2013) 84.

¹⁵ Cain, 9 Circles. 18.

¹⁶ Morrissey, Ted and Mclaughlin Trauma Theory as an Approach to Analyzing Literary Texts, 50–60.

¹⁷ Cain 9, Circles, 10–11.

¹⁸ 1. Lucy Bond, "American Trauma Culture after 9/11," *Frames of Memory after 9/11*, 2015, 16–51.

¹⁹ Sarah O'Brien, *TRAUMA and FICTIONS of the "WAR on TERROR" Disrupting Memory*. (New York, Routledge, 2021) 21.

²⁰ O'Brien, *TRAUMA and FICTIONS of the "WAR on TERROR" Disrupting Memory*. 29.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Alieda Assmann, "Memory, Individual and Collective, The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis Robert Goodin, and Charles Tilly, (UK, Oxford Academic, 2006), 215.

²³ Assmann, *Memory, Individual and Collective*, 220.

²⁴ Allen Meek, *Trauma and Media: Theories, Histories, and Images*. (London: Routledge, 2010.), 173.

²⁵ Meek, *Trauma and Media: Theories, Histories, and Images*, 175.

²⁶ O'Brien, *TRAUMA and FICTIONS of the "WAR on TERROR" Disrupting Memory*, 10.

²⁷ Cain, 9 Circles, 18.

²⁸ Cain, 9 Circles, 10–13.

²⁹ Cain 9, Circles, 13.

³⁰ Nick Caddick, Brett Smith, and Cassandra Phoenix, "Male Combat Veterans' Narratives of PTSD Masculinity, and Health," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 37, no. 1 (January 2015): 97–111.

³¹ Cain 9, Circles, 18.

³² Cain, 9 Circles, 23.

³³ Brett Barrouquere, "Ex-Soldier Spared Death Sentence for Iraq Murders," *The Independent*, May 22, 2009, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/exsoldier-spared-death-sentence-for-iraq-murders-1689347.html> , (accessed 27/03/24.)

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ J. Douglas Bremner, "Traumatic Stress: Effects on the Brain," *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 8, no. 4 (December 31, 2006). 447

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Anand, Kuljeet Singh, and Vikas Dhikav. "Hippocampus in health and disease: An overview." *Annals of Indian Academy of Neurology* vol. 15,4 (2012), 241.

³⁸ Cain 9, Circles, 23.

³⁹ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*. New York, NY: Basic Books. 1992, 161.

⁴⁰ Cathy Caruth, "An Interview With Robert Jay Lifton," essay, in *Trauma Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore , Maryland : John Hopkins University , 1995), 138.

⁴¹ Cain 9, Circles, 18.

⁴² Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 10.

⁴³ Cain 9, Circles, 78.

⁴⁴ Valerie Steele, *Shoes: A Lexicon of Style* (London: Scriptum Editions, 2005).129.

⁴⁵ Cain, 9 Circles, 15.

⁴⁶ Cain, 9 Circles, 78.

⁴⁷ Cain, 9 Circles 76.

⁴⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1995).

⁴⁹ Cain, 9 Circles, 57.

⁵⁰ Gavan Patrick Gray, "The New Orientalism: The Influence of Media Representation of 'The Other' in International Affairs," *ASR Chiang Mai University Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 5, no. 2 (September 2019).

⁵¹ Cain, 9 Circles, 20.

⁵² Cain, 9 Circles, 12.

⁵³ Samir Talib, A Hierarchy of Competing Reals': Metatheatre, Fictional Worlds and Representation in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Journal of the College of Arts. University of Basrah*, no77, 2016, 21.

⁵⁴ Eric S. Rabkin, "Metalinguistics and Science Fiction," *Critical Inquiry* 6, no. 1 (October 1979): 79-97.

⁵⁵ Herman *Trauma and Recovery*, 161.

⁵⁶ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 50.

⁵⁷ Mike Fischer, "'next Act's 'Equivocation' Speaks Truth to Power," *Journal Sentinel*, February 5, 2018, <https://www.jsonline.com/story/entertainment/arts/2018/02/04/next-acts-equivocation-speaks-truth-power/301272002/>.

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