

Trauma, Narrative Medicine, and Healing: A Literary Analysis of *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*

Bhavya Pandit^{1*}

ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the intersection of trauma theory and narrative medicine through a literary analysis of *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* (2017) by Gail Honeyman. Narrative medicine, which underscores the need of incorporating patients' narratives into medical treatment, offers a framework for comprehending the intricacies of trauma and recovery from a patient-centered viewpoint. This study elucidates the manifestation of trauma in literary narratives and explores its ramifications for healthcare practice, emphasizing how trauma theory can enhance comprehension of the psychological and emotional aspects of patient experiences. This research aims to examine the protagonist Eleanor Oliphant's traumatic experiences and her path to rehabilitation, illustrating how literature, can offer significant insights for healthcare practitioners dealing with trauma survivors. This paper utilizes qualitative methods and literary analysis to examine important themes including trauma, solitude, and recovery. The study examines the protagonist's narrative to reveal how her introspections and the storytelling process match the tenets of narrative medicine, which highlight the therapeutic value of personal tales in cultivating empathy and trust in patient care. Significant findings indicate that interacting with literature enhances healthcare practitioners' comprehension of the patient experience and assists in mitigating the enduring impacts of trauma. This work has notable consequences for both literary and medical domains, as it illustrates the importance of literature in augmenting physicians' empathy and strengthening their capacity to address the needs of trauma survivors. This study addresses a deficiency by implementing narrative medicine ideas to a particular literary piece, so enhancing the discourse on the intersection of literature and medicine in facilitating healing.

Keywords: *Narrative Medicine, Trauma Theory, Healing, Literary analysis, Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*

The focus of literature and medicine has emerged as an important field of study in recent years, especially when viewed from the perspective of narrative medicine. This scholarly discipline underlines the role of the patient narratives in the art of medical practice calling for more humane understanding of human condition that involves patients in light of the deeply embedded emotional and psychological aspects of diseases. In this paper, the importance of narrative medicine is discussed in relation to trauma theory through the analysis of Gail Honeyman's novel. As a result, the analysis of the protagonist's experience

¹Research Scholar, United school of Liberal Arts and Mass Communication, Karnavati University, Gandhinagar
*Corresponding Author

Received: November 14, 2024; Revision Received: December 26, 2024; Accepted: December 31, 2024

Trauma, Narrative Medicine, and Healing: A Literary Analysis of *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*

will focus on identifying how narrative can be used in the healing process for individuals and communities that have been traumatized.

On this premise, trauma theory – a theory that analyzes the impact of traumatic events on individuals or societies – offers a helpful lens through which to interrogate the plot *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*. The plot of the novel revolves around the protagonist Eleanor Oliphant a shy and a lonely woman whose life takes a drastic turn due to the revelation of a terrible event in her childhood. Describing what it feels like to live with mental illness, loneliness, and the scars inflicted by trauma, Honeyman raises profound questions about the role of storytelling in the process of recovery. The study shows that using trauma theory to read Eleanor’s story reveals not only the conflicts within the text but also the ways in which the narrative functions as a mode of narrating trauma.

Narrative medicine is a theoretical approach that has it that the process of healing requires the narration of stories. “This rise of the power of storytelling in medicine helps me to conceptualize what has been evolving in my own practice of internal medicine and in the emerging field of narrative medicine” (Charon, 2005). Using the main character of the novel *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* the author proves that narrative can help people regain social connections after trauma. Eleanor’s slow revelation of herself to others, to her past, as well as to her relationships and her end confrontation with her trauma, are all narrative in essence. The struggles of dealing with the traumatic past are beautifully reflected in the character of Eleanor. She is a lonely woman with psychical suffering caused by tragic incident at her childhood and further life events that kept her alone. The narrative structure of the novel resembles the condition of the protagonist’s mind, which is written in the first person; as a result, readers enter Eleanor’s head and feel what she feels. This close narrative perspective is imperative in trauma theory, since the latter is marked by how trauma disturbs the victim’s ability to relate to reality and therefore, other people. While going through her everyday activities, audience gets to see how the psychological trauma affects her, the way she perceives and interacts with others, proving the point, that psychological injuries are inescapable. Also, the way they strive to rebuild their social relationships in the novel emphasizes the necessity of social ties for recovery. The thematic role played by Raymond and other coworkers of the protagonist is that they contribute to the process of her character build up and healing. In these interactions, the thematic elements of compassion, empathy, and understanding in the context of traumatic backgrounds are highlighted by the narrative. These relationships are a classic example of how and why the principles of narrative medicine can be effective in helping patients overcome adverse circumstances and events in their lives.

Apart from analyzing Eleanor’s life story, this work will also explore the social roles and implications associated with her experience. Trauma is not solely a personal issue but rather, people are exposed to the greater societal issues that encompass social aspects, including stigma, mental health, and other consequences of systemic abandonment. Analyzing the timeline of the series from the perspective of the culture that surrounds mental health issues and trauma will help the reader to realize how difficult it is for people to seek professional assistance and how critical it is to find support. These themes coherently fit into the concept of narrative medicine because the novel supports the notion of patient-centered care, embracing the idea of the essence of each person within the framework of social realities. Finally, given paper seeks to shed light on the transformational role of narrative medicine grounded in trauma theory and its ability to enrich the discourses on ‘healing’.

Trauma, Narrative Medicine, and Healing: A Literary Analysis of Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine

Trauma theory

Trauma theory can be described as a theory in literary criticism and psychology that focuses on the analysis of trauma and its portrayal in written works and popular culture.

The word trauma stems from the Greek word *traûma*, meaning wound. The definition of trauma as a physical wound first appeared in the 1650s in medical practice. The 1890s saw the emergence of trauma as a psychic wound, thus paving the way for psychology and psychiatry (Zhukova, 2020).

It emerged as a field of study in the 1990s, largely in response to interest in understanding psychological trauma in war veterans, Holocaust survivors, victims of sexual abuse, etc. It was established at the postgraduate level for interdisciplinary study in the early 1990s. Key early works included Cathy Caruth's books *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) and *Trauma: A 'Memory' of postmodernism: Explorations in Memory* (1995). According to trauma theory, traumatic events are so emotionally and psychologically demanding that the person cannot translate them into a narrative and her or his identity. It is not really 'done' at the time and is only 're-lived' time and again in the form of flashbacks, nightmares, thoughts, and so on.

The concept of the horrors of a traumatic past that come back in delayed and repeated forms; and the concept of trauma is something that annihilates not only language, but meaning as well. Survival in this context can therefore be defined as a form of running away from the actual fight with the trauma. The scholars include Cathy Caruth, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Geoffrey Hartman, Judith Herman, Bessel van der Kolk and others. The field relies on Freudian psychoanalysis, Lacan's theory, and deconstructionism. "Trauma as a medical category became popular with the definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (ptsd). ptsd was applied to both victims and perpetrators of the Vietnam War (1955– 1975) and contributed to the depoliticization of war crimes" (Young, 1995, as cited in, Zhukova, 2020, p. 218). According to the trauma theory, modern literature has been influenced to a large extent by social trauma – wars, genocide, oppression and so on. The narratives of trauma are disjointed, nonlinear and fragmented; Literature is the best way to express the horror that cannot be put into words.

Literary Analysis, Character Analysis and Themes

Gail Honeyman is an accomplished Scottish writer, who has gained immense popularity worldwide following the release of her first book *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* in the year 2017. The literary text was based on a newspaper article about loneliness and was praised for its understanding of mental health issues, loneliness, and trauma. The novel for which she wrote was awarded the Costa First Novel Award in 2017 and has been translated into many languages (Gail Honeyman, 2024).

In the text, the reader is introduced to Eleanor Oliphant, a middle-aged woman, who cut off all her interpersonal relationships and lives in Glasgow, Scotland. In the use of the first-person narrative, Honeyman is able to give the reader a glimpse into the life of a woman who has intentionally built a defense mechanism around herself due to past traumatic experiences and mental health issues. The subject of loneliness, as well as the process of recovering, and the possibility of change through human relationships are the facets of the theme which are embodied in the novel. The subject matter of Eleanor's character development lends itself well to qualitative analysis since it pertains to complex issues of the emotions and psyche. Through analyzing the trajectory of her character's story, the reader learns how trauma is depicted and the process of healing is visualized to occur through the lens of interpersonal

connections and introspection. Using the literary elements and the notions of narrative techniques, this analysis discusses how Honeyman sustains and develops these themes.

Isolation as a defense mechanism

This aspect of Eleanor's life becomes evident right from the onset of the novel as she is depicted as an isolated character. She says she only has merely polite interaction with the people at the workplace and does not engage with her co-workers at all. Eleanor is not only physically but also socially excluded due to the abuse that the main character suffered in childhood from her mother. Honeyman brilliantly shows how Eleanor sculpted her life to protect herself from being hurt, thus depicting the idea of loneliness. An early description of Eleanor's routine sets the tone for her existence: "I don't think anyone on earth would understand what it feels like to be me" (Honeyman, p. 278). This statement is not only a personal description of her daily routine but also a manifestation of the coping mechanism that she has created after years of mistreatment through emotional and physical abuse. That is why the absence of a social component strengthens her independence, which she holds on to so as not to engage in a deeper search for herself and reflection on the trauma. This way, Honeyman introduces the theme of isolation into the story: it is a defense mechanism and shackles at the same time.

Hence, Eleanor is lonely not just by choice but the degree of loneliness is tied to her state of mind. The sense of isolation is exacerbated when she asserts, "I don't have any emotional requirements" (Honeyman, p. 308), indicating that Eleanor has persuaded herself that emotional relationships are unnecessary for survival. Honeyman highlights the duality of isolation—it serves as both a safeguard and a confinement. Isolation serves as a literary device for reflection, allowing readers to comprehend the complexity of Eleanor's psychological landscape and the wounds concealed beneath her seemingly collected facade. Thus, isolation complements the novel as a literary device, providing readers with the understanding of the complexity of the internal life of Eleanor and the pain she carries beneath her calm surface.

Trauma and its lingering effects

The tragedy, which forms the basis of Eleanor Oliphant's character, is gradually disclosed throughout the book, as the main character's psyche is depicted in the process of deteriorating. Abuse at the hands of her mother, from whom she finally escapes but who continually harasses Eleanor on the phone each week, seems to prevent her from moving forward. Her mother's voice represents a form of emotional violence that continues to shape Eleanor's self-perception: "Mummy has always told me that I am ugly, freakish, vile. She's done so from my earliest years, even before I acquired my scars" (Honeyman, p. 30). This abuse leads to Eleanor feeling as though she does not deserve love and other forms of companionship. Psychological qualitative research has been employed to elucidate the impact of childhood maltreatment on adult relationships particularly in areas such as attachment and self-esteem. Eleanor's failure to establish reasonable relationships, and her rejection of physical contact, parallels them. Suffering is not an episode of her life, but rather present in all spheres of existence, including the strict daily schedule and self-critical thinking. This becomes evident in her fixation on superficial things, like her appearance.

"Don't you go getting sidetracked, now, Eleanor—don't go ignoring Mummy, will you? Oh, you think you're so smart now, don't you, with your job and your new friends. But you're not smart, Eleanor. You're someone who lets people down. Someone who can't be trusted. Someone who failed. Oh yes, I know exactly what you

Trauma, Narrative Medicine, and Healing: A Literary Analysis of Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine

are. And I know how you'll end up. Listen, the past isn't over. The past is a living thing. Those lovely scars of yours—they're from the past, aren't they? And yet they still live on your plain little face. Do they still hurt?"

I shook my head, but said nothing.

"Oh, they do—I know they do. Remember how you got them, Eleanor. Was it worth it? For her? Oh, there's room on your other cheek for a bit more hurt, isn't there? Turn the other cheek for Mummy, Eleanor, there's a good girl.

And then there was only silence. (Honeyman, pp. 132-133).

This line not only points to Eleanor's fragmentation of her self-identity but also touches on the dissociation that is typical for trauma victims. So, the story of Eleanor turns into the possibility for readers to look at the modern experience of how one tends to live with the trauma that never got addressed and the strategies individuals adapt to cope with their suffering.

Mental health and healing

Another strength of the novel is how accurately it depicts the experience of a person with a mental illness. Eleanor's basic existence lacks flexibility and freedom, social interaction and general communication, and self-destructive indulgence in alcohol to escape everyday life. The novel's most compelling feature is its forthright depiction of mental health. Eleanor's existence is defined by rigid rituals, denial of social interactions, and an urge to dull her senses with drink. She states,

On Fridays, I don't get the bus straight after work but instead I go to the Tesco Metro around the corner from the office and buy a margherita pizza, some Chianti and two big bottles of Glen's vodka. When I get home, I eat the pizza and drink the wine. I have some vodka afterward. I don't need much on a Friday, just a few big swigs. I usually wake up on the sofa around 3 a.m., and I stumble off to bed. I drink the rest of the vodka over the weekend, spread it throughout both days so that I'm neither drunk nor sober. Monday takes a long time to come around. (Honeyman, p. 5).

This routine offers her an illusion of control, although it conceals her profound emotional distress. But her metamorphosis into the 'mad woman' in the later part of the novel shows that there was a hidden core behind this mask. It is only years later that she starts the path to recovering from her trauma, with people helping her, including Raymond, a fellow worker. The transformation occurs at the end of the show when she accepts people's help after a suicide bid. One of the most important and powerful themes of the novel is the depiction of Eleanor's suffering from depression, loneliness, and suicidal tendencies: It seems that the author aimed at presenting the most realistic aspect of the human soul and portraying all the facets of the main character's experiences.

Indeed, from a qualitative research point of view, the journey illustrated by Eleanor shows how relationships are central in the recovery narrative of mental health. Raymond's gentleness over time contributes to Eleanor's slow but steady refusal to remain guarded as the two characters consequently teach the power of connection for transformation. The pivotal moment in Eleanor's mental health journey occurs when she recognizes her loneliness and permits herself to be vulnerable, "I concede that I was feeling very unhappy. But doesn't everyone feel sad from time to time?" (Honeyman, p. 279). After a breakdown that ultimately reveals the cracks in her façade, she seeks treatment and starts to face her horrific history. The book indicates that healing is non-linear; it is an intricate, continuous process that necessitates

Trauma, Narrative Medicine, and Healing: A Literary Analysis of Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine

confronting one's history. From the source, it is evident that the process of recovery does not follow a linear process; instead, it is full of twists and one is forced to face their past. Eleanor's visits to a therapist, where she begins to unravel her traumatic childhood, are crucial as it opens a new era of her emotional freedom and searches for love.

Human connection as a catalyst for change

In this case, Eleanor at the beginning of the story is an individual who thinks that she does not need anyone in her life; however, from this novel it is evident that human connection is what drives the change. Among the characters, Raymond has a major influence on her becoming a new person. His laid-back nature means Eleanor is able to have a relationship with a man without expectations of getting hurt, which is a new experience for her. Honeyman weaves an uplifting narrative by using Raymond's character as a counterpoint to Eleanor, and showing how simple gestures are capable of changing lives. His invitation for Eleanor to join him for lunch or his casual check-ins are seen by Eleanor as extraordinary gestures because of her past. This is the novel's message in a nutshell: everyone is capable of change if only someone will take the time and trouble to show them kindness. This is evident in her interactions with Raymond and other men that she comes across in her life, where she realizes that it is okay to be vulnerable. She begins to allow herself to start dreaming for better days ahead, which is seen when she starts making some minor changes to improve her health. As she reflects in the final chapters,

“Raymond,” I said, “you can't know how much it means to me, to have a friend—a genuine, caring friend. You saved my life,” I whispered, scared that tears might come, here in the café, and embarrass us both. Now that I'd started crying in public more often, it seemed that I would do it at the drop of a hat.” (Honeyman, p. 358).

This line contains the story's lesson about companionship as the means of healing and becoming the better version of ourselves.

The literary piece is an engaging, touching story of a woman learning to navigate the world of trauma and healing while being painfully, yet richly, ordinary. Eleanor's progress presents readers with a more complex depiction of the lasting impacts of trauma and healing, that is rooted in interpersonal relationships and self-reflection. Honeyman effectively employs the use of first-person narrative to make readers feel Eleanor's internal turbulence first hand and this brings about the gains she undergoes prominently. By paying attention to these themes, we can understand how the narrative of the novel is not simply one of endurance but also transformation. In this analysis, it has been helpful to present a qualitative research lens on the most impactful themes prevalent in this novel, namely, trauma, mental health, and the search for togetherness. Examining the characters and their psychological disorders mingled with the theme of the novel and characterization and the structure of the novel offers a lot of topics for a literary and psychological analysis. Through Eleanor's progressive unlearning of the lessons, she was taught about how to live she learns how to live through vulnerability; Honeyman's novel thus leaves the reader with a reminder of the strength of the human spirit.

Eleanor Oliphant experiences severe trauma in her life and this has defined her life in every aspect. In fact, the burn scars that Eleanor had received from the fire her mother set are clear physical manifestations of the emotional wounds she has. Her trauma starts early in her life at the age of ten when she is removed from her home and placed into the foster care system which is itself a nightmare. The loss of her father and a later interaction with her ex-boyfriend Declan deepen Eleanor's psychological issues, triggering feelings of abandonment and

Trauma, Narrative Medicine, and Healing: A Literary Analysis of Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine

distrust. Her coping strategies such as avoidance and alcohol use are consistent with the manifestations of post-traumatic stress disorder. Eleanor is experiencing postpartum psychosis, as made clear by her thoughts and behaviors and she is tormented by intrusive thoughts and memories at night time, especially her mother's voice. This gross depiction of protagonist's state of mind corresponds with trauma theory arguments that adverse childhood experiences affect adults' functioning. Thus, the focus in the course of the narrative is not a miracle cure for the girl's illness but the process of her becoming a 'social animal' again. In this book, Eleanor forms significant relationships with Raymond, Mrs. Gibson, Sam, Keith, and her sister that serves as a major turning point in her life. These interactions do not only give her new ways of perceiving herself and the world and make Eleanor question her unrighteousness and the risk of emotional openness. By having sessions with Maria Temple as a therapist and with the help of her friends, Eleanor starts dealing with her past and finding better ways to handle emotional issues. This transformation illustrates the novel's central theme: the strength of human touch as an instrument in restoration from severe childhood trauma.

The novel provides the audience with an opportunity to observe the story from the insider's perspective and see how Eleanor deals with the problems such as depression, loneliness, and post-traumatic stress disorder. From the story of Eleanor, the audience is able to understand how trauma manifests in her daily existence, with her friends and family, and the way she perceives herself. The elaborate demonstrations of her thoughts and actions reveal the life-altering impact of childhood trauma. Eleanor starting building relationships and telling her story to other people, which shows the reader the importance of the personal narrative. Raymond, Mrs. Gibson, and her therapist Maria Temple show that voicing and discussing traumatic events via narratives contribute to the process of recovery. This aspect of the novel highlights narrative medicine's core principle: that storytelling and listening to the stories of others can be an effective means in terms of knowledge and treatment of psychological discomfort.

Eleanor's therapeutic sessions with Dr. Maria Temple are shown to be major in her character development, and significant in portraying the efforts of narrative medicine and trauma theory in handling with psychological suffering. In the process of using guided conversations, Dr. Temple helps Eleanor recall and discuss the traumatic incident, the fire that affected her in both physical and psychological aspects. Through listening to Eleanor's story and providing her with a platform to express herself, Dr. Temple uses narrative medicine approaches to facilitate Eleanor's healing. This way this approach gives her an opportunity to tell others and get a different view on what has been haunting her for so long. This relates directly with both the concept of narrative medicine since Eleanor is able to develop a sense of coherence as she presents her past; it also relates to the process of healing from trauma. Dr. Temple's losing-oriented therapy, including making Eleanor to close her eyes and recall certain events, reveals the buried feelings in Eleanor. It is through such a gradual process of exposing her to traumatic memories in a controlled setting that Eleanor is taken through until she is able to cope with them without breaking down, and this contributes to the changes observed in her mental health.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior works in the field of narrative medicine as a framework have a positive impact on strategies which facilitate the improvement of the communication between patients and doctors, enrich the empathy of the healers and focus upon the patients. Research has also

Trauma, Narrative Medicine, and Healing: A Literary Analysis of Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine

shown that benefits derived from using narrative medicine include increased patient satisfaction and improved overall health. Yet, there is a dearth of information on how narrative medicine is implemented in the health care setting.

According to Balaev, intergenerational trauma theory does not pay sufficient theoretical attention to trauma in literature because it only psychologizes the traumatic feelings, explaining them as “speechless fright.” Meanwhile, place theory has some benefits since it involves cultural and social factors in understanding the process of trauma. This is a basic notion that helps in studying the impact of trauma in literary works. Therefore, this lens underlines the context as the key to the trauma process and the creation of its meaning.

In another work, the authors argue that the desire for narrative acts is pivotal when patients as well as caregivers have to make sense and tell the complex stories of their sickness. Brockmeier focuses on the hermeneutics of narrative in a medical setting is consistent with Balaev’s claim about the importance of place in trauma, as both underline traumatic contexts and their representation as interpretive processes in specific environments. The research gap that has been defined in this work is the absence of the application of the philosophies of narrative hermeneutics towards the specific practices of narrative medicine evident in *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*.

In the article “Literature and Medicine,” Downie discusses the failure of pre-convict medical education to provide a deep understanding of individuals and emphasizes the role of literature in addressing this concern. The indicated researched gap relates to the absence of using Downie’s whole person understanding concept within the literary analysis of the novel *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*. Analyzing the plots of the novel in order to understand the manifestation and treatment of trauma and the role of the environment as the protagonist’s trajectory can help in the study of the connection between narrative medicine and representation of trauma in contemporary literature.

The article “Editing and Interdisciplinarity: Literature, Medicine, and Narrative Medicine” Maura Spiegel and Rita Charon present a fairly recent concept of the narrative approach to medical practice where literature plays the most important part in defining the nature of illness and the function of healing. The authors argue that literary studies—particularly expert knowledge of close reading and narrative interpretation—provides physicians with the essential equipment to acquire a deep understanding of patients’ lives. Their account sets out the growth of the concept of narrative medicine beginning from a period of shared concern by literary scholars and practitioners into a more coordinated one of a specific discipline feeding off the other.

Johanna Shapiro's study, "Illness Narratives: Reliability, Authenticity and the Empathic Witness," looks at the interaction between patient stories, medicine, and literary studies. Shapiro continues to argue that despite the fact that the patient stories are critical in facilitating an understanding of the person as emphasized by Downie, the patient narratives are often viewed as partisan and therefore their truthfulness is questionable. Shapiro underlines the danger of focusing on the so-called ‘transgressive narratives’ instead of the ‘regular ones’, noting that both might be as valid and meaningful for the patient.

Atul Gawande's book, "Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End," the book focuses on the deficiencies of modern medicine in relation to realities like aging, dying, and

Trauma, Narrative Medicine, and Healing: A Literary Analysis of Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine

the purpose of a good life towards patients with terminal ailments. The author, using the examples from his own practice, stories of patients and surgical knowledge, looks at the problems with the health care system which tends to prolong life even if it means increasing suffering and decreasing people's autonomy. Even though Gawande's book focuses on a critical approach to the medical procedures around death and dying, it does not offer a clear analysis of the narrative medicine in trauma and healing in relation to the novel, albeit within the context of the literary analysis of *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* (2017).

This research review assesses how the literature can enhance the facility of medical practice and learning through enhancing the understanding of disease, injury, and healing. While Greenhalgh emphasizes the use of narratives as told by patients, the study itself is focused on the healthcare context, and the connection between the themes is not made clear, thereby limiting the possibility of applying these themes to literary analysis. There is a significant lack of research on how this type of work depicts and might depict both trauma and healing, and possibly employing dimensions of narrative medicine as defined by Greenhalgh may help to determine the therapeutic potential of storytelling as well as its applicability to narratives of suffering and recovery.

Another literature analysis explores the importance of literature in promoting medical knowledge, especially on injuries and healing. Doukas et al., emphasize the necessity of extending literature reading in medical schools to enhance medical education students' empathy and professionalism. Their study, set within medical education, identifies a gap in employing literary analysis as part of trauma and narrative medicine.

The study investigates the intersection of narrative medicine and patient care, emphasizing Charon's assertion regarding the essentiality of narrative competence in detecting, understanding, and responding to patients' narratives to foster empathy and professionalism in clinical practice. Narrative medicine, employing techniques like careful reading and reflective writing, enhances understanding of patients' perspectives and their illness stories. Nevertheless, a shortcoming remains in the utilization of these findings within literary analysis, particularly with trauma and recovery in the core text.

The article that follows examines the evolving understanding of trauma within medical and cultural contexts, highlighting the importance of narrative medicine in the healing process. Zhukova asserts that the concept of trauma has transitioned from solely physical injuries to include psychological disorders, with PTSD emerging from the Vietnam War and transforming perceptions of trauma survivors. The sources reveal a lack of investigation into the portrayal of trauma in everyday life, urging the examination of human and cultural implications beyond medical diagnoses.

Rita Charon's literature underscores the importance of narrative medicine in linking therapeutic techniques to patients' life experiences, notably for those facing trauma and searching healing. Sources argue that traditional medical practices often overlook patients' subjective experiences, while narrative medicine emphasizes careful reading, reflective writing, and active listening to achieve a deeper understanding of the various physical, psychological, and social aspects of illness. This strategy stimulates empathy and patient engagement in recovery, although it also presents challenges such as miscommunication and ethical concerns.

Trauma, Narrative Medicine, and Healing: A Literary Analysis of *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*

Investigating the novel's depiction of the protagonist's trauma and her healing journey, possibly through the framework of narrative medicine, may provide significant insights into the therapeutic efficacy of storytelling and its relation to overarching themes of social isolation, mental health, and resilience. Nevertheless, the article fails to explicitly discuss the application of literary analysis to modern novels that examine trauma and healing.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilizes qualitative and literary analysis methodologies to enhance comprehension of the narrative theory discussed in the book. Incorporating qualitative methods facilitates the study of narrative specifics and enhances comprehension of the advantageous aspects of narrative medicine by analyzing individuals' personal experiences and views within trauma theory. This study examines the diverse elements of life narratives in the source literary text to demonstrate the efficacy of narrative therapy as a means to address trauma and facilitate recovery. This research paper employs a methodical literary approach centered on the primary text; *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*. This interpretative method, which adopts a reader-centric approach, facilitates an examination of the representation and supervision of trauma theory within the text. This paper explores the contributions of narrative medicine as an approach for comprehending and addressing trauma through the lens of character relationships and psychological processes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, narrative medicine holds great promise for addressing the complex healthcare needs of a diverse population in India. By embracing patient narratives and integrating them into clinical practice, healthcare providers can better understand and respond to the unique needs of their patients. This paper recommends further research and practical strategies for implementing narrative medicine in healthcare system. Altogether, *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* providing a compelling example of how trauma theory and narrative medicine work in tandem. Taking cues from trauma theory, it is possible to explain how the psychological damage that Eleanor suffered as a result of her mother's abuse, the fire, and her personal tragedies influences her actions and emotional loneliness in the novel. In the context of the present paper and the narrative medicine framework, the novel shows that the process of telling one's story, to the self and others, is crucial for the self-healing process. Eleanor's acts of gradually sharing her past experiences with Raymond and her therapist help her cope with the suppressed childhood trauma. This act of telling and listening, that constitutes the basis of the narrative medicine approach, points to the fact that health is not only physical but also social processes of humanization carried out through the exercise of compassion, relation, and narrative. The major themes included in the paper suggest that narrative plays a vital role in the analysis of trauma and in the process of healing.

Using the concepts of trauma theory, one can understand the ways in which traumatic experiences of childhood affect a person as an adult, impacting the state of their psyche, relationships, and perception of themselves. Thus, the narrative mode of medicine sheds the light on the possibility of viewing Eleanor's story not only as the individual process of recovery but as the one that needs the listeners who would recognize her suffering and share her pain. It is in this sense that the novel depicts the symbolic coming of age of Eleanor, who requires friendship, as well as love in the form of Raymond's civility, to finally recuperate. These findings have significant implications for narrative medicine with vulnerable adults in the broader context of trauma-informed care indicating that, healthcare practitioners, counselors, and policy makers should consider narrative medicine as a key approach in mental

Trauma, Narrative Medicine, and Healing: A Literary Analysis of Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine

health interventions for trauma survivors. Understanding how storytelling works, practitioners may establish more comprehensive healing environments that assist not only in curing symptoms of trauma but also take into account the backstories of patients. Additionally, the policies that come through the therapeutic practices based on narrative care practices remain potentially strong in enhancing the lot of any patient enduring traumatic experiences while reflecting patient-centered and empathetic care.

REFERENCES

- Balaev, M. (2008). Trends in literary trauma theory. *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 41(2), 149-166. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44029500>
- Brockmeier, J. (2014). Understanding narrative hermeneutics. *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 44(1), 85-106. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jnt.2014.0003>
- Charon, R. (2005). Narrative medicine: Attention, representation, affiliation. *Narrative*, 13(3), 261-270. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/20079651>
- Doukas, D. J., McCullough, L. B., & Wear, S. (n.d.). Perspective: Medical education in medical ethics and humanities as the foundation for developing medical professionalism. *Project to Rebalance and Integrate Medical Education (PRIME) Investigators*.
- Downie, R. S. (1991). Literature and medicine. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 17(2), 93-96, 98. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27717024>
- Greenhalgh, T. (1999). Narrative based medicine: Narrative based medicine in an evidence-based world. *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 318(7179), 323-325. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25181711>
- Honeyman, G. (2017). *Eleanor Oliphant is completely fine*. Viking.
- Honeyman, G. (2017). *Gail Honeyman official website*. <https://gailhoneyman.com> (Accessed on September 11, 2024).
- Jing, Y. (2015). Review of *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* by Atul Gawande. *World Literature Today*, 89(5), 76. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7588/worllitetoda.89.5.0076>
- Rousseau, G. S. (1981). Literature and medicine: The state of the field. *Isis*, 72(3), 406-424. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/230258>
- Schönfelder, C. (2013). Theorizing trauma: Romantic and postmodern perspectives on mental wounds. In *Wounds and Words: Childhood and Family Trauma in Romantic and Postmodern Fiction*. Transcript Verlag. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1wxrhq.5>
- Shapiro, J. (2011). Illness narratives: Reliability, authenticity, and the empathic witness. *Medical Humanities*. <http://mh.bmj.com/>
- Spiegel, M., & Charon, R. (2009). Editing and interdisciplinarity: Literature, medicine, and narrative medicine. *Profession*, 2009, 132-137. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25595923>
- Zhukova, E. (2020). Trauma. In Antonio De Lauri (Ed.), *Humanitarianism: Keywords*. Brill. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv2gjwwnw.105>

Acknowledgement

With utmost sincerities, I would like to thank my academic advisor, Dr. Shikha Thakur, for extending tremendous support, constructive feedback and patience throughout the course of creating this research paper. I thank them for their acquired knowledge and advice contributing to my comprehension of narrative medicine and trauma theory. I would also like to thank Karnavati University that served as the platform within which this study has been conducted. An extra word of gratitude is due to my colleagues and fellow scholars who provided feedbacks that informed this study. I would also like to thank my parents, family and friends for their constant encouragement and understanding throughout this journey. Their support has been a

Trauma, Narrative Medicine, and Healing: A Literary Analysis of Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine

source of motivation for me, especially during challenging moments. Lastly, I would like to thank the readers of this research, for being interested in the exploration of literature, trauma and healing that I continued to do.

Conflict of Interest

The author wishes to clarify that there are no competing interests in the publication of this research paper. As mentioned earlier, this research was carried out individually and thus, the author did not receive any funds or financial considerations from any source in doing this research in order to warrant or allow for any kind of outside interference or manipulation of the results, analyses or conclusions of the research. Every opinion and conclusion made in the course of the discussions are original and independent work of the author and are not in any way influenced by any special, business or/and political interests of the author or research to any of the companies, organizations, political parties or individual being involved in the different discussed topics.

How to cite this article: Pandit, B. (2024). Trauma, Narrative Medicine, and Healing: A Literary Analysis of Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(4), 2357-2368. DIP:18.01.226.20241204, DOI:10.25215/1204.226