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THE SCIENCE FICTION OF TRAUMA IN MATT HAIG'S *THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the emergent literary subgenre known as *The Science Fiction of Trauma* which involves the distinctive combination of science fiction components and studies of the complicated effects of trauma. The study posits that science fiction narratives often address trauma more explicitly than traditional literary studies, which may shy away from grappling with its complex and chaotic nature. An analysis of speculative fiction allows the exploration of intricate symbolic depictions of symptoms related to trauma (such as flashbacks and dissociation), the influence of trauma on one's sense of self, and the broader societal ramifications of significant traumatic incidences. Exploiting science fiction settings that incorporate futuristic technology, encounters with extraterrestrial beings, or society that have been altered greatly, enhances the ability to depict the psychological and emotional consequences of trauma. Science fiction encompasses more than just the portrayal of spaceships and robots. It can be utilised to investigate genuine human experiences such as trauma. Science fiction writers employ the extraordinary components of the genre, such as sophisticated technology, alien civilizations, and futuristic settings, as instruments. These tools serve a purpose beyond creating visually impressive action scenes or constructing fictional worlds. They are employed to enhance the emotional resonance of trauma and make it more relatable for the reader. The aim of the study is to analyse Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* conducting the elements of *The Science Fiction of Trauma* in which fictional portrayals can both reveal and influence the dynamic advancements in scientific comprehension and representation of trauma.

Keywords: literary trauma theory, midnight library, parallel universes, postmodern trauma novel, science fiction and trauma

MATT HAIG'İN *GECE YARISI KÜTÜPHANESİ* ROMANINDA TRAVMANIN BİLİM KURGUSU

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, *Travmanın Bilim Kurgusu* olarak bilinen ve bilimkurgu bileşenleri ile travmanın karmaşık etkileri üzerine yapılan çalışmaların kendine özgü bir bileşimini içeren yeni edebi alt türü incelemektedir. Çalışma bilimkurgu anlatılarının travmayı, travmanın karmaşık ve kaotik doğasıyla boğuşmaktan imtina eden geleneksel edebiyat çalışmalarından daha açık bir şekilde ele aldığını ileri sürmektedir. Spekülatif kurgunun analizi, travmayla ilgili semptomların (geriye dönüşler ve disosiyasyon gibi) karmaşık sembolik tasvirlerinin, travmanın kişinin benlik duygusu üzerindeki etkisinin ve önemli travmatik olayların daha geniş toplumsal sonuçlarının keşfedilmesini sağlar. Fütüristik teknolojiyi, dünya dışı varlıklarla karşılaşmayı veya değiştirilmiş toplumu içeren bilim kurgu ortamlarının kullanılması ise travmanın psikolojik ve duygusal sonuçlarını tasvir etme becerisini büyük ölçüde artırır. Bilim kurgu, uzay gemilerinin ve robotların tasvirinden daha fazlasını kapsar. Travma gibi gerçek insan deneyimlerini araştırmak için kullanılabilir. Bilim kurgu yazarları, sofistike teknoloji, uzaylı uygarlıkları ve fütüristik ortamlar gibi türün olağanüstü bileşenlerini araç olarak kullanır. Bu araçlar, görsel olarak etkileyici aksiyon sahneleri yaratmanın veya kurgusal dünyalar inşa etmenin ötesinde bir amaca hizmet eder. Travmanın duygusal rezonansını arttırmak ve okuyucu için daha ilişkilendirilebilir hale getirmek için kullanılırlar. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Matt Haig'in *Gece Yarısı Kütüphanesi* adlı eserini, kurgusal tasvirlerin travmanın bilimsel olarak kavranması ve temsil edilmesindeki dinamik ilerlemeleri hem ortaya çıkarabileceği hem de etkileyebileceği *Travmanın Bilim Kurgusu* unsurlarını kullanarak analiz etmektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: bilimkurgu ve travma, edebi travma teorisi, gece yarısı kütüphanesi, paralel evrenler, postmodern travma romanı

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Introduction

The concept of *Science Fiction of Trauma* does not have a universally accepted definition. It encompasses various ideas that explore the intersection of trauma and elements of science fiction. This genre is expanding and sophisticated, utilising science fiction techniques to delve into the intricacies of human experience following trauma. James and Mendlesohn (2003) support this assortment as “*science fiction is part of a polysemic discourse. Texts are vulnerable to a multiplicity of interpretations, each of which produces a different landscape of science fiction, as reflected in the numerous academic and ‘fan’ canons which have emerged over the past eight decades*” (p.10). So, it seems to be both a controversial as well as an inspiring term thanks to recent advancements in technology in literary canons. Science fiction of trauma narratives explores the effects of trauma that are frequently overlooked or intentionally disregarded in conventional literary and cultural examination. There is a reluctance or unease within such professions to explore certain intricacies. Psychodynamic theories, which are based on Freudian concepts such as the unconscious, offer valuable insights into trauma. However, they may occasionally lack the necessary depth and breadth to fully comprehend it. The impact of trauma surpasses the explanatory capacity of these models. Medical and scientific progress in the field of trauma is broadening our comprehension beyond the limitations of previous psychological frameworks. Science fiction narratives mirror the swift reconsideration of trauma and present us with potential outcomes or provoke us to consider the implications resulting from this change in our comprehension. Thomas and Brooker (2009) define it as “*fiction set in an imagined world that is different from our own in ways that are rationally explicable (often because of scientific advances) and that tend to produce cognitive estrangement in the reader*” (p.4).

It can be put forth that science fiction enables authors to construct narratives including sophisticated technology, extraterrestrial civilizations, or futuristic environments that magnify or elucidate the psychological and emotional repercussions of trauma. Such trauma-inflicted narratives may depict characters who are dealing with flashbacks, nightmares, and hypervigilance in extraordinary circumstances. Cathy Caruth’s views on trauma justify the necessity for science fiction elements, “*trauma can only be comprehended through recurring flashbacks that vividly recreate the incident, as the mind is unable to represent it in any other way*” (2016, p.91). The re-enactment of past incidents could only be possible by science fiction elements in the narrative. Without trauma, the wound would remain unexpressed or unacknowledged. Caruth’s perspective on trauma expands upon Freud’s definition of trauma as a ‘wound of the mind’ by highlighting the idea of a ‘double wound’ which refers to the additional pain caused by memories of the initial tragedy. In a similar vein, Erikson (1985) notes that our memory serves to remind us of the unresolved issues and lingering traumas that continue to affect us (p.184). Erikson’s perspective suggests the presence of dissociation, delayed development, and repeating patterns. Moreover, the utilisation of science fiction devices like memory-altering technology or experiential reenactment can provide insights into the influence of trauma on one’s self-identity and coping strategies. This can be achieved by examining the transmission and manifestation of historical or societal traumas in subsequent generations, as well as exploring the effects of major disasters or societal disruptions on both individuals and communities in futuristic scenarios. In this vein, Meillassoux (2015) stresses this modification as “*Man’s relation to the world undergoes a change by virtue of a modification to scientific knowledge, which opens up unheard-of possibilities for him*” (p.5). However, a number of critics, including Ernst van Alphen (1999) and Nouri Gana (2013), have

referred to traumatic experiences as '*failed experiences*' that happen when the mind is unable to generate a reflecting account of such an event that can be remembered, and at the same time, the area of the brain that is responsible for the contextualization of emotions is rendered dormant. As a consequence of this, a collapse of experience occurs, which manifests itself in the form of uncontrollable and upsetting repeating memories, flashbacks, and dreams of the traumatic incident (Gana, 2013, p.81). In this context, the function of science fiction in literature to reveal the effects of unexperienced lives could be discussed. It was Hugo Gernsback who first coined the term 'Science Fiction' in the United States in 1929 when "*science fiction first coalesced as a distinct and recognizable literary genre*" (Link & Canavan, 2015, p.5). However, it is undeniable that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or some earlier Gothic stories, even the Sumerian Epic of *Gilgamesh*, as well as Poe's terror stories established the context or background of the classical science fiction genre. As one of the few researchers focusing on the relationship between trauma and science fiction, Luckhurst (2014) notes that science fiction literature is often artificially categorised into distinct 'hard' and 'soft' forms in the same vein. Hard science fiction is characterised by its reliance on the physical sciences, prioritising ideas over character development, and striving to depict projected futures with a strong emphasis on scientific integrity. Soft science fiction, in contrast, places greater emphasis on the social and political implications of technological advancements, as well as the strong emotional reactions they elicit (p.161).

The subsequent section of this study proceeds to provide a more comprehensive interpretation that science fiction can offer a lens for exploring complex and difficult topics like trauma in a way that is engaging and thought-provoking. By portraying the diverse experiences of survivors, science fiction can encourage compassion and understanding for those grappling with trauma. Some narratives use fantastical elements to explore themes of healing, overcoming adversity, and building resilience in the face of trauma. Although the relationship between science fiction and literary trauma is complex and fascinating due to the fact that both genres mutually impact and enrich one another in a variety of ways, the relationship between the two is more complicated. The elements of science fiction could serve as a facilitator of healing or recovery of posttraumatic neurotic effects. On the other hand, the setting, characters, and plot of science fiction would bring about repressed traumatic experiences. Thus, it is arguable that these two genres bear an interwoven, intricate association which necessitates further studies on purpose. According to Russell Meares (2000) "*moderate trauma will eliminate autobiographical and episodic memories, leaving the semantic and other systems intact*" (p.49), however, people can retrieve generic knowledge, but they are incapable of recollecting their personal history. It has been argued by some critics like Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James that the imaginative components of science fiction enable writers to construct scenarios that reflect or amplify real-world catastrophes, such as wars, pandemics, or technological progress, as in prevalent novels like Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (1959), Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Kim Stanley Robinson's *Ministry for the Future* (2020). Science fiction facilitates the examination of the psychological and societal consequences of such occurrences from an objective standpoint as its conventions such as meetings with extraterrestrial beings, journeys through time, or alterations to the human body can function as powerful symbolic representations of individual or societal distress. Overall, these distinctive elements can represent emotions of dislocation, apprehension towards the unfamiliar, or struggle with one's sense of self following a distressing encounter. Protagonists in science fiction narratives frequently encounter

exceptional obstacles, compelling them to build distinctive strategies for dealing with them, which can provide valuable perspectives on practical methods for managing trauma in real-life situations. Some science fiction characters are profoundly influenced by previous tragedies, illustrating how such encounters may mould individuals in any context that enhances the intricacy and descent of their motivation and deeds. The field of trauma aesthetics has typically preferred the use of modernist techniques that emphasise challenging and disturbed representation and form in order to portray trauma effectively. As a result, the usage of modernist techniques has been sceptical of the emphasis on narrative enjoyment commonly associated with popular cultural genres such as science fiction (Luckhurst, 2013, p.159). Hence, drawing on science fiction in the analysis of trauma might encompass the examination of cultural traumas through fictional occurrences, promoting comprehension and dialogue in which it can subvert traditional interpretations of trauma by incorporating it into imaginative settings. Although all counter concerns about the validity of the science fiction and trauma interaction, Luckhurst maintains his claim as

They [Science Fictions] explore a side of the multiform discourse of trauma that cultural and literary studies have been uncertain or even censorious about addressing. But since so much of the medicalization of trauma has pushed beyond the comfortable formulae of psychodynamic theories of trauma, these visions challenge us to address the rapid development of new scientific understandings that are likely to reconceptualize notions of trauma in the very near future. (p. 166)

It can be deduced that science fiction of trauma could be one of the prosperous visions of trauma-related theories to enable further studies on the issue. It might function as a *deus ex machina* against the vulnerability and dissociation of the victims in classical trauma theory. The studies conducted in literary trauma theory do not possess a significant historical foundation compared to classical trauma theory. Prominent studies emerged among literary circles during the final two decades of the twentieth century. Trauma studies became popular after the release of several influential publications. These include *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* in 1985 by Elaine Scarry, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* in 1992 by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* in 1995, and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* in 1996 by Cathy Caruth, and *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* in 1996 by Kali Tal. The concept of ‘trauma theory’ was initially introduced in Caruth’s book *Unclaimed Experience* (p.72). The initial understanding of trauma in literary circles was that it was an ineffable and unrepresentable phenomenon. It was believed that wounds could not be expressed by words, and trauma could not be told from both individual and social perspectives. Language was considered insufficient in conveying the details of a traumatic experience. The initial scholarly works on literary trauma criticism primarily examined the concept of representation in order to analyse the function of trauma in literature. Balaev (2014) expresses that Caruth, in her psychoanalytic post-structural perspective, argues that trauma is an intractable problem of the unconscious that reveals the fundamental inconsistencies of experience and language (p.1). Rather than representational issues, this study focuses on the conduction of science fiction elements in the recovery of trauma in literature. Similarly, Visser (2014) emphasizes the necessity of new ways to depict trauma, like Caruth’s demand for a new mode of reading trauma, while the exact form of the psychological damage experienced by the characters may be impossible to articulate, they are able to comprehend and accept the underlying experiences that caused their trauma. They then find innovative and

unique methods to reconcile with their past and continue living (p.117). Studies on post-trauma narratives support the exploration of different narrative structures like science fiction, incorporating many viewpoints and images. On the one hand, for Gomel (2010), science fiction, the genre that has introduced the terms 'time travel' and 'time machine', serves as a reflection of postmodern concepts of time. Instead, she describes science fiction as a quantum representation of the various temporal configurations of postmodernity. On the other hand, science fiction is likened to a Grecian Urn that captivates our minds with its enigmatic and perplexing imagery. Instead, it could be interpreted as a historical documentation of the various pasts, presents, and futures of postmodernity, serving as a crucial tool for understanding the postmodern concept of time (p. XI). It serves as a practical means for symbolically representing and addressing modern traumas, whether through repeating them, denying them, or working through them (Kamińska, 2016, p.85). The moving shelves of *The Midnight Library* function like a time-lapse machine for the chosen novel of this study. To the point Wicks (2014) associates time travel in science fiction with memory in literature "*Time travel moves closer to explaining the experience of traumatic memory than a more traditional literary narrative would, thereby empowering the author to share with the reader in new and productive ways*" (p.335). What critics who view science fiction as temporally influenced are expressing is the idea that science fiction is a form of literature that explores counterfactual scenarios. It does not depict things as they truly are, but rather as they could potentially be, whether in the future, an alternate past or present, or a parallel dimension (Roberts, 2009, p.9). The books on the shelves bear possibilities of multiverses like a time travel machine while puzzling the memory of Nora. The significance and novelty of this study lies in its examination of the impact of trauma using science fiction elements, as opposed to the long-standing discussions surrounding the portrayal of trauma in the field of trauma theory.

This study aims to contend that Matt Haig's foray into the genre of science fiction of trauma was rather driven by the exact level of dedication that is exemplified in his writing. It also provides a significant chance to enhance the comprehension of the text of *The Midnight Library* by employing the theoretical perspectives of science fiction of trauma. As this novel was first published in 2020, not so many critical studies have been undertaken on it yet, nor has the notion of science fiction of trauma itself. Hence, this study will serve as a valuable contribution to the repository of literary knowledge. This study seeks to obtain data which will help address these research gaps in the science fiction of trauma.

Research Method

For the reason that the data collected are in the form of narrative literary works, as well as ideas and understandings that are utilised to support the analysis by investigating and explaining things connected to regret, despair, isolation, alienation and their traumatic consequences, this research is considered to be qualitative research. In this aspect, the use of qualitative studies is a well-established approach in literary criticism.

The research method that the author uses is a descriptive method which can be interpreted as an approach that involves a systematic analysis and comprehensive documentation of the different components of a piece of literature. The focus is on the literal content of the text, without initially attempting to make deeper interpretations. The objective is to establish a thorough comprehension of the many elements of the work, laying the groundwork for subsequent analysis and interpretation. Thus, a literature review or library research was the method of data collection

that the author of this study utilised in order to obtain the necessary information for the investigation. Besides, the current exploration benefits from specific schools of literary criticism, like Psychoanalytic criticism based on trauma theory, to discuss the scientific fiction of trauma. The current study uses qualitative analysis in order to gain insights into rethinking the representation of trauma with science fiction devices.

A Science Fiction of Trauma in *The Midnight Library*

The science fictional elements in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* are crucial in examining the themes of regret, lost chances, and the significance of existence. These elements could be considered as alternative realities, parallel universes, multiverses, perpendicular lives as well as people with extraordinary abilities. Nora Seed, the protagonist of the novel, struggles with profound regret and isolation and endeavours to terminate her life, she experiences an overwhelming sense of regret, as if the anguish in her mind permeated her entire body just three hours before her decision to end her life. It seemed as though it had completely taken over every aspect of her being (Haig, 2020, p.20). Haig also names one of the succeeding chapters as *The Book of Regrets* to indicate the overall theme of the novel. Regret, a potent emotion, serves as the driving force behind protagonist Nora Seed's initial sadness and her subsequent journey through *The Midnight Library*. *The Book of Regrets* materialises her personal fears and hypothetical scenarios. It enables her to address the consequences of her previous decisions and the possibility of chances that she may have overlooked. *The Book of Regrets* is a captivating literary tool. It is a location where Nora feels she can discover all the potential improvements her life could have had if she had made alternative decisions. It symbolises the boundless potential that life may encompass. This aligns with the central theme of the work, which emphasises the need to embrace life without fixating on circumstances that are beyond our control. Nora confronts her regrets in the various lives she experiences in *The Midnight Library*. The method compels her to scrutinise her preconceived notions of happiness and contentment. Although several alternate lives provide glimpses of potential outcomes, they also reveal the interconnectedness of our choices, resulting in both favourable and unfavourable repercussions. While delving into *The Book of Regrets*, Nora realises the pointlessness of dwelling on past choices. Engaging in this process of investigation and discovery enables her to attain a more equitable viewpoint on her own life. The underlying theme is that dwelling on the past is futile, and the secret to a satisfying existence lies in embracing progress, despite its flaws. The core of *The Midnight Library* lies in the chapter titled *The Book of Regrets*, which encapsulates the intricate essence of regret, the deceptive allure of ideal lives, and the significance of self-acceptance and enjoying one's current existence. The author combines classical trauma theory devices with science fiction elements to illustrate the impact of sudden death on individuals. In the novel, Nora undergoes profound emotional distress due to the unexpected loss of her beloved mother three months before her wedding. Additionally, the death of her dog further contributes to her traumatic experiences. Despite Nora's suggestion to postpone the date, it was never actually rescheduled. As a result, her sorrow became intertwined with feelings of melancholy, anxiety, and a sense of powerlessness over her own life. The wedding appeared to be a manifestation of the disordered sensation she experienced as if she were bound to a train track. The only means by which she could release herself from these constraints and liberate herself was to withdraw from the wedding (2020, p.37).

It can be easily detected in the novel that Nora has consistently had a sense of isolation throughout her adolescence. Her father ceased to show concern for her after she declined to become an Olympian. Her brother, Joe, severed his connections with her when she departed from the band. She experienced a sense of desertion following the demise of her mother. Her intentions were doubted by everyone around her. She seems to have faith in the concept of post-traumatic growth, which refers to the positive changes that can occur in those who have experienced trauma and have not been able to find a companion as comforting as being alone. (2020, p.124). Emphasising the vitality of alienation, James and Mendlesohn (2003) claim that science fiction “*values alienation as the central element of character*” (p.10). However, Nora discovers herself in the mysterious midnight library, while she is planning to commit suicide that midnight, a boundless realm brimming with volumes that symbolise each potential life trajectory she may have pursued, contingent upon various decisions made. Under the guidance of a sympathetic librarian, Mrs Elm, Nora sets out on a voyage across these parallel realities, encountering the pleasures and sorrows of lives that were not lived which is implied as the trauma of being in limbo. She calls herself ‘sliders’ between these fictional worlds which sends them into “*state of total in-between*” (2020, p.146). However, enticed by the apparent allure of potentially better alternatives, she promptly recognises that each course of action comes with its own challenges and disappointments. Each life she had encountered had a distinct sensation, akin to different movements in a symphony, and this particular one felt quite daring and inspiring. (2020, p.206) Observing the constraints and flaws of these other existences or lives, she eventually develops a fresh admiration for her own, disorderly yet significant, actuality. Nora engages in a self-reflective journey where she directly faces her previous regrets, recognises the consequences of her choices, and initiates the process of self-forgiveness. The anguish of disappointing others and herself, the anguish she had attempted to evade less than an hour earlier reach the climax with her coming into the midnight library, meeting Mrs. Elm and the moving shelves of the library. A multitude of regrets started to converge. Indeed, as she gazed at the book’s unfolded pages, the anguish she experienced was even more intense than the discomfort she had felt while roaming around Bedford. The collective intensity of the remorse pouring from the book was becoming excruciating. The burden of guilt, grief, and sadness is overwhelming. She reclined, propping herself up with her elbows, released the weighty book, and tightly closed her eyes. She struggled to breathe, as though intangible hands were constricting her throat (2020, p.37).

Nora reestablishes contact with estranged loved ones, rekindles her passion for music, and develops an appreciation for the uncomplicated pleasures of life in this life. In the end, she comes to the understanding that genuine satisfaction is found not in pursuing elusive opportunities, but in fully accepting and cultivating the present moment, including its imperfections, and fostering the important relationships that enhance it. Matt Haig portrays the psyche of Nora trapped in another reality, whereby he presents a vivid depiction of a world brimming with anguish, despair, trepidation, and sorrow. After a careful analysis, she has determined that the suffering caused by her existence, characterised by chaos and turmoil, outweighs the potential distress that others could experience in the event of her demise. She considers herself to be a waste of a carbon footprint. (2020, p.61) Throughout the novel, parallel and perpendicular multiverses enable the writer to probe into the essence of the experience, illustrating how it exists outside the boundaries of ordinary existence while still being firmly grounded in genuine worries and threats, “*Regrets don’t*

leave. They weren't mosquito bites. They itch forever" (2020, p.83). Her statement indicates how the neurotic effects of regrets are presented in traumatic symbols.

As drawn attention earlier, the novel explores the concepts of regret, lost chances, self-acknowledgement, and the significance of interpersonal bonds which inspires readers to contemplate their own decisions, recognise the significance of the present moment, and discover serenity and appreciation in their individual life trajectories, as depicted in Nora's journey in limbo, "*Caught in the middle. Struggling, flailing, just trying to survive while not knowing which way to go. Which path to commit to without regret*" (2020, p.188). The existence of this transitional realm between life and death, characterised by divergent life trajectories, is contingent upon the inclusion of science fiction components. This environment, the midnight library, provides Nora with the opportunity to probe into alternative scenarios and contemplate decisions she did not previously make, so expanding the limits of what is real and possible. Every fictitious book in the library symbolises a distinct existence that Nora may have experienced, probing into the ramifications of various decisions. Haig utilises this parallel verse notion to explore the intricacies of many life trajectories, highlighting the possible pleasures and regrets that come with varied choices. It can be claimed that this stimulates self-reflection regarding our own decisions and the significance we attribute to them. Nora's vital regrets in her root life are stated as "*I haven't become an Olympic swimmer. I haven't become a glaciologist. I haven't become Dan's wife. I haven't become a mother. I haven't become the lead singer of The Labyrinths. I haven't managed to become a truly good or truly happy person. I haven't managed to look after Voltaire*" (2020, p.30). The number of fictional lives Nora provided with an attempt to undo or change her previous experiences in the library reveals the science fiction of trauma.

Given this situation, it is hardly surprising that the library might be interpreted as a symbolic representation of regret, serving as an extensive collection of unfulfilled potentialities. Within this imaginative realm, Haig investigates the inclination of humans to fixate on the past and envision alternate trajectories, emphasising the constraints of such contemplation. During her exploration of several lifestyles, Nora comes to the realisation that true satisfaction does not stem from impressive accomplishments but rather from significant interpersonal relationships. The science fiction components function as a setting that highlights the significance of ordinary relationships and the value of cherishing our lives, flaws and all, "*She learned that undoing regrets was really a way of making wishes come true. There was almost any life she was living in one universe, after all*" (2020, p.208). The novel's portrayal of Nora's exposure to several realities slightly undermines the notion of an inevitable destiny. This implies that regardless of the decisions we make, life will inevitably present us with both difficulties and pleasures, highlighting our capacity and power to influence our own experiences, "*it is not the lives we regret not living that are the real problem. It is the regret itself. It's the regret that makes us shrivel and wither and feel like our own and other people's worst enemy*" (2020, p.271).

The science fiction elements in *The Midnight Library* function as a means to go through the enduring human emotions and inquiries in the past and at present. It can be inferred that Haig's narrative effectively fosters a sense of empowerment, urging readers to fully embrace existence, value their current circumstances, and discover significance in their individual voyage, "*whatever exists between universes is most likely not a library, but that is the easiest way for me to understand it. That would be my hypothesis. I see a simplified version of the truth. The librarian is just a kind*

of mental metaphor. *The whole thing is*" (2020, p.147). It could be easily observed from his fiction that she is aware of the science fiction presence of the library and Mr. Elm. It is not only the case that the novel does not directly handle the process of showing trauma in the typical manner, but it also does not instantly address the process itself. Although it investigates the sentiments of bereavement and lost chances, which can carry a similar emotional load, trauma often refers to discrete, profoundly significant events that result in long-lasting psychological consequences. This is because these effects can be caused by traumatic experiences. It is important to notice that the author refers to one of the early chapters as *To Live is to Suffer* (2020, p.12). This chapter has a plethora of descriptions, such as 'sooth-grey clouds,' 'a conveyor belt of despair,' 'my life is chaos,' and 'the universe leaned towards chaos and entropy' (2020, p.12). It is still feasible to investigate the relationship between the themes and characteristics of the book and the process of overcoming emotional challenges and achieving personal growth.

Haig dedicates a substantial part of the novel to facing the realities of Nora's previous decisions and the consequent anguish they have caused, "*the feeling of being suffocated by so much regret*" (2020, p.62). By involving herself in these alternative realities, she does not obliterate the original experience, but rather recognises and assimilates the associated feelings, "*she felt inside her a craving for other things, other lives, other possibilities*" (2020, p.207). Engaging with her emotional terrain can be interpreted as a stride towards individual development. During her exploration of other lifestyles, Nora comes to the realisation that even choices that appear perfect will not eliminate all difficulties. By reframing possibilities, she has a greater understanding and appreciation for the positive aspects of her current life while also acknowledging its shortcomings. This change in viewpoint can serve as a mechanism for effectively handling emotional challenges and attaining a state of acceptance. Nora highlights the value of human connection by involving herself in several iterations of her own identity. This recognition, together with her endeavours to reestablish connections with cherished individuals in her actuality, emphasises the significance of encouraging relationships in the process of mending and maintaining emotional wellness. While the book does not provide a definitive solution for previous emotional wounds, it highlights the tolerance of embracing our decisions and the trajectory we have followed. What remains unclear, however, is whether this finding is a true representation of science fiction of trauma. She quotes from Sartre to indicate the possibility of recovery, maybe through science fiction, "*Life begins on the other side of despair*" (2020, p.345). Nora achieves a state of tranquillity and thankfulness by valuing the favourable parts of her current existence and the knowledge gained from previous encounters, which are essential in overcoming emotional difficulties and progressing in life, "*That, she supposed, was the basis of depression as well as the difference between fear and despair. Fear was when you wandered into a cellar and worried that the door would close shut. Despair was when the door closed and locked behind you*" (2020, p.212). Although *The Midnight Library* does not explicitly focus on trauma healing, it provides significant perspectives on managing emotional challenges and fostering individual development. Nora embarks on a journey of self-discovery and emotional understanding by directly facing her past, reevaluating her perspectives, forming meaningful connections, and cultivating acceptance. It is crucial to acknowledge that the recovery process of each individual is distinct, and strategies that are effective for one person may not be effective for another. In the end, Nora gives up her plan to commit suicide, questioning, "*Will my life be miraculously free from pain, despair, grief, heartbreak, hardship, loneliness, depression? No. But do I want to live?*"

Yes. Yes. A thousand times, yes” (2020, p.272). However, her perception of sadness, a trauma and grief-driven notion, is as follows,

The most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis is that ... There are patterns to life . . . Rhythms. It is so easy, while trapped in just the one life, to imagine that times of sadness or tragedy or failure or fear are a result of that particular existence. That it is a by-product of living a certain way, rather than simply living. I mean, it would have made things a lot easier if we understood there was no way of living that can immunise you against sadness. And that sadness is intrinsically part of the fabric of happiness. You can't have one without the other. Of course, they come in different degrees and quantities. But there is no life where you can be in a state of sheer happiness for ever. And imagining there is just breeds more unhappiness in the life you're in'. (2020, p.177)

In the context of the future, civilizations may be able to recognise patterns and rhythms not only in their own existences but also across the vast expanse of time and space. It is possible that these patterns include cycles of ups and downs, advancement and regression, which are a reflection of the fluctuation of feelings and events. There is a possibility that the protagonist of the book will struggle with the notion that their experiences of pain, tragedy, or fear are unique to their own existence. Notwithstanding this, she may ultimately arrive at the understanding that these sentiments are timeless and intrinsic elements of the human (or extraterrestrial) condition, irrespective of the technological progressions or social structures that influence their presence. It is possible for someone to come to the realisation that no amount of technological or scientific advances can protect them from the complex emotional components of existence when they are immersed in a science-fiction narrative. In light of this, they might take into consideration the idea that traumatic experiences and feelings of melancholy are fundamental components of consciousness, closely entwined with the fundamental essence of sentient existence across the universe. It is possible that Nora will come to the realisation that happiness and melancholy are not incompatible with one another but rather are intertwined components of the human experience. It is possible that she may study the idea that periods of joy commonly result from difficult experiences and that genuine happiness cannot be fully appreciated without first having an understanding of its opposite. There is a possibility that Nora will continue to be unhappy if she continues to cling to the erroneous assumption that she is always happy or if she makes an effort to avoid the difficulties that are an inevitable part of life. Alternatively, individuals may acquire the ability to completely embrace and enjoy a wide range of feelings, deriving comfort and importance from the collective experience of being.

Conclusion

As a new and complicated genre, science fiction of trauma uses scientific methods to probe the intricacies of the human condition in the aftermath of trauma. It draws on a wide range of ideas that investigate the intersection of trauma and science fiction. It employs futuristic technology or notions as a metaphorical representation of the trauma experience, which falls within the realm of speculative technology that modifies the mind. Due to this modification, it may represent dissociation while sophisticated medical procedures could symbolise the process of healing. Representing the psychological disorientation and impotence that are sometimes associated with traumatic experiences is the goal of the building of societies that are repressive or unpleasant. Moreover, utilising characters with fragmented memories or modified perceptions effectively conveys the subjective and demanding aspect of recalling terrible situations, hence enhancing the

realism of the narrative. The fictional shelves function like a time machine for Nora, like the repressed dreams or nightmares that haunt the victim, in order to justify the idea that un-lived lives would not be a better option even if you had a chance to undo your experiences in those alternative, parallel lives. It is the elements of science fiction that enable the author to conduct such a solution to have Nora pay a visit to her previous wounds.

There are always trauma-inflicted regrets in life that people would like to undo because of the traumatic effects they postulate. Science fiction elements in literature could provide us with some rewinding ways as in the novel though it should be taken into consideration carefully. Such rewinding in the form of alternative lives could not always result in the desired versions. Nora's final deduction in the novel proves this claim, each alternative life has its distinctive weaknesses and strengths. Thus, the best life is the one you have in hand. Science fiction techniques make her give up committing suicide in the novel. It could be asserted that science fiction saved her life from this perspective. It also enables the readers to sense the tension of being in-betweenness in life with various dilemmas which also bring about neurotic effects in human life. Such a dilemma implies the fragmented nature of trauma representation. Unlike the traditional trauma theory, science fiction of trauma provides the characters with some opportunities to reassess their retrospective wounds with its peculiar techniques like imagery environments and parallel lives. A character may exhibit a tangible representation of their psychological distress, as in Nora's aversion or hesitation in some lives, such as a dysfunctional cybernetic implant that occurs during episodes of flashbacks in these parallel lives. A society governed by the manipulation of thoughts and behaviour could serve as a symbolic representation of the sense of powerlessness experienced following a traumatic life span. An individual traversing through time may confront the contemplation of revisiting or reversing the distressing events they endured as in the fictional flashbacks of Nora.

The Midnight Library exemplifies the great potential of the science fiction genre to enlighten aspects of the human experience that are typically difficult to communicate through the use of conventional storytelling. Although the novel under literary criticism does not expressly focus on the process of recovering from trauma, it does explore themes of sorrow, bereavement, and self-exploration. These themes have the potential to emotionally connect with persons who have struggled with difficult experiences. It is an interesting instance of how our viewpoints influence the way that we experience the world around us that Nora's adventure into multiple alternative universes gives as an engaging analogy. In these universes, she might undo certain regrets by shifting bookcases that she has imagined moving around. In conclusion, her experiences illuminate the limitations of idealised hypothetical scenarios and highlight the fact that reaching fulfilment often includes appreciating the present moment and cultivating vital connections rather than becoming fixated on opportunities that were not taken advantage of. The moving shelves of the library gave her the opportunity to realise that every life has its own unique set of advantages and disadvantages, and she was able to understand this point.

As a result of the fact that the science fiction setting of *The Midnight Library* has a purpose that goes beyond simply providing an interesting backdrop, it raises questions about the relationship between our experiences of trauma and the growing body of scientific information concerning memory, decision-making, and alternate possibilities. There is a possibility that the novel does not live up to the expectations of readers who are seeking a direct investigation of trauma theory. However, it does raise the question of whether the speculative nature of science

fiction can bring innovative perspectives on the complicated effects of trauma and the process of recovery. Haig's novel compels us to reconsider the ways in which science fiction could supplement traditional trauma approaches, thus expanding the ways that we can navigate complex emotional landscapes in literary studies.

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