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## Traumatic Childhood Memories as a Self-Discovery Tool in Margret Laurence's "The Diviners" and Margaret Atwood's "Cat's Eye"

Lec. Intisar R. Khaleel

*E-mail: fara\_arts@ tu.edu.iq*

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**Abstract:** Traumatic childhood memories can be regarded as the experiences that happen in children especially between ages brackets of 0-6 years. Infants and young children react in different ways when faced with difficulties on drastic changes in their live. This research hypothesizes that traumatic childhood memories can be a tool used for self-discovery in the literary texts. This research validates the hypothesis by tackling the theory of traumatic childhood memories as a method of analyzing the selected texts following the character analysis as well as comparison approaches and achieves its aim. The selected texts are; Margret Laurence's "The diviners", and Margate Atwood's "Cat's Eye". The research begins with an introduction to the theory; a discussion follows the analysis of the selected texts. The research ends with the conclusion that sums the results that validate the hypothesis.

**الخلاصة:** يمكن ان تكون ذكريات الطفولة هي تلك التجارب التي تحدث للاطفال بين الاعمار (صفر - 6 سنوات), تكون ردة فعل الاطفال الرضع والصغار مختلفة عندما يتعرضون لصعوبات وتغييرات عنيفة في حياتهم. يفترض هذا البحث ان ذكريات الطفولة الصادمة يمكن ان تكون اداة

لكشف الذات في النصوص الأدبية. يؤكد البحث هذه النظرية وذلك بمعالجة نظرية ذكريات الطفولة الصادمة كطريقة لتحليل النصوص المختارة بعد تحليل الشخصيات وكذلك طرق المقارنة وتحقيق اهدافها. النصوص المختارة هي رواية مارغريت لورنس (العرافين) ومارغريت اتوود ( عين القطة). يبدأ البحث بمقدمة عن النظرية, يتبعه مناقشة وتحليل النصوص المختارة, وينتهي البحث بأستنتاج يلخص نتائج البحث الفرضية.

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## Introduction

Memory has a very important role in shaping the world in the mind of any person. It occupies a great space in the formula of an individual which is later reflected throughout his behaviors and his outcomes in the life. Whenever the memory has good experiences, it helps the individual to form a brilliant future and a successful social life. On the contrary, when the memories are painful and disappointing, they may lead the person to adopt failure throughout his/her life because his/her self-esteem is not high. Childhood memory, in particular, are of great significance because, they shape the self-image in the mind of the person. The people who were around the child and how they see the person will have a say in outlining one's whole reactions towards the world as well as towards him/herself in the future.

Traumatic childhood memories, in this sense, can be regarded as the experiences that happens in children especially between an ages brackets of 0-6 yeas (Alat 3). Infants and young children react in different ways when faced with difficulties on drastic changes in their lives. Although most people claim that the children are young to understand, most of the children experience the impact of traumatic experience (Holton and Kelley 337). These traumas are the main sources of what these children espouse in their future life. Moreover, the memories are not restricted to the children only, but to their parents as well. The researches have indicated that young children have been affected by events that threatens their safety and the safety of their parents or their guardians.

Children are bond to experience trauma due to loss of parents, events of war, abuse or painful ordeal (McPherson-Sexton 65). Trauma therefore entails an event that involves actual threat to the physical integrity of self or others who are close to the child. Just like adults, even children experience trauma and as a result, it should be noted that trauma in children exists. Therefore, it should not be ignored (Monachino, 118). According to Judith L. Herman who is regarded as the first writer who describes traumatic

childhood memories and the ways of recovery from them in 1992 in her book, *"Trauma & Recovery and an Accompanying Article"* (Herman, 1997), this theory proposes that the suffering character has a history that created the memories of unwanted or offensive incident. An experience which includes some core issues which determine the nature as well as the structure of the character such as shame and guilt, powerlessness, reenacting offensive patterns in present relations, and distrust. (Herman, 1992. 377–391).

Herman's opinion is that the most essential part of healing from the traumatic childhood memories is reaching the aim of private-protection, actual self-care, and well emotion- ruling aptitudes. These are the standard working procedures which will help great improvement for the personality and many choices to be possible for the individual.

Different writers and novelists have identified these phenomena in their writings. They have explained the concept of traumatic childhood memories in details. Moreover, they depict how the suffering characters come over the painful memories and be recovered to be normal persons. Margaret Laurence's novel, *"The Diviners"* and *"Cat's Eye"* by Margaret Atwood are good examples for such texts which deal with this theme and shed light on how these kinds of trauma can affect the way the person receive his/her role and status in the society.

### **Methodology**

This research takes traumatic childhood memories as a tool for discussion. It follows the character-analysis as well as the comparison approaches as a method for analyzing the selected texts.

### **Discussion**

Margaret Laurence who was born in 1926 and died in 1987, is known for being the best fiction writers in Canada whereby her fame comes as a result of her portrayal of women characters with a psychological perception. Margaret has articulated the inbuilt conflict that occurs in women through the use of inner monologs and memory recollection (Trickey and Black 261). Her book, *"The Diviners"*(1974) is one that uses images to symbolize the psychic status of women. She stands unique as she gives the narration of the story with different views. *"The Diviners"* is one of the novels of the Manawaka Cycle which is an imaginary home that was created by Margaret Lawrence whereby she recollected the memories of the past. She recollects that she had the chance to recollect the pictures of her homeland where she was in England with her husband. Her narration is what makes her different from the other modern feminists.

### **"The Diviners"-Traumatic Childhood Memories**

In this context, the method of analysis will rely majorly on Margaret Laurence's book, "The Diviners" and other sources that evaluate the same issue as Laurence did and in this sense it is another novel written by a different writer on the same topic. Through different ways of writing, Margaret has described how children experience traumatic memories and how their lives are impacted and how they change and overcome their fears in time at a cost. The vivid description of the protagonists enables one to understand that even children experiences trauma due to different circumstances and loss.

It is a culmination of the Manawaka works with a profound and complex exploration of the meaning of life. Margaret Laurence explores in greater depth the hard life that was undertaken by Morag Gunn who is the narrator-protagonist (Laurence 2). When she was a child, Morag always felt dispossessed, and this made her suffer from the sense of inadequacy in her parents. The feeling placed her in a quandary regarding her identity. She becomes the victimized individual of the identity crisis who is controlled by the voyage of exploration and with the goal of acquiring adequate self-perfection.

The purpose of getting self-perfection leads to her comprehension which interwove the present and the past for a satisfactory resolution of her identity. Moran Gunn finds herself an orphan, the fact that subjects her to the deprivation of any knowledge regarding her family (Laurence 2). She disregarded her foster parents as her parents, and she loathed the couple since they did not treat her accordingly. She is given a small room, and when she opted to go to sleep, her foster mother would not allow it.

Her adoptive parents were not living a better life either since Christie furnished his house using the rejects of the town's people. His house was filled with the rickety chairs, torn curtains and other rejects (Laurence 4). The sight of all that caused Morag to loath and be irritated by her parents. Her foster father, Christie Logan becomes one of the greatest characters from Morag's past and her path towards divine although she takes most of her life to come to terms with that fact.

Christie Logan is a constant force in the life of Morag. He welcomes her after her parents pass away, gives her love. Christie teaches Morag qualities that are inappropriate to a socially good lady, "You don't want to believe everything them books say". (83) Christie teaches her not to be "a doormat". (107) Moreover, he tells her "never to say sorry"(109)and above all, he gives her priceless gifts of her ancestors while inventing some Piper Gunn with a claim that it is the young Morag's ancestor (Laurence 4). The whole gesture allows a lonely girl to cling on to a family past with a hope that it would help

her in her goal of knowing her identity. She is moved by the story given about her Scottish ancestors who had braved the seas so that they could reach to alien shores and provide for the future generations with their ground of being.

During her adolescence, she has a great need to be accepted in the society as the tale of her mythical ancestors becomes her comfort. She wanted to get rid of her past and dwell in the present, and as a result, she started rejecting Christie's tale regarding her ancestors. She decided to get married to Brooke Skelton so that she could move on from her past or rather escape it all together (Laurence 5). She finally left Brooke as a sign of moving towards the discovering of her identity, and she could visit Scotland in an attempt to discover her Celtic background. She finally decided not to visit the home of her ancestors which was in the Sutherland and finally embraced the fact that her real home was in Canada and that her actual father was not the long dead Colin Gunn.

She experienced a traumatic childhood moving from rejection to embracing and acceptance of who she was. Her trouble was not over, yet as she was involved in two terrible events in the epic of her life. She is sent by Lachlan to report on the death of Piquette Tonnerre and her two children who perished in a fire, and also to report on the self-induced abortion of Eva Winkler (Laurence 7). She later leaves the town and went into the urban environment of Winnipeg, and later she settled in Toronto. She rejected to stay in Manawaka since she needed to survive and also to grow and therefore forsook her self-exploration (Laurence 7). She realizes that her journey all along was not to escape from home, but she wanted to explore her identity as well as the world.

Morag lives a traumatic life with no satisfaction and always seeking for what she did not know she needed. She thought that she needed to find out more about her family, but Morag's sojourn is to be viewed as an affirmative search for freedom and individuality (Laurence 6). Her journey to Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Toronto was to quest her selfhood, and it did not end well since she forms a family relationship and finally broke it (Laurence 7). Due to her feeling of loneliness, she attains an obsessive desire to appear city-bred is drawing her to the sophisticated professor Brooke Skeleton, a relationship that couldn't last. She finally becomes a victim of dispossession. When she stands beside Christie while singing Prin's favorite hymn, it dawns on her that her marriage was such a wreck.

After ending her relationship with Brooke, she needs to survive and grow and that leads her to have an affair with Jules Tonnerre who was her teenage boyfriend back at Manawaka and a victim of social and cultural alienation

(Laurence 8). The relationship lasted for three weeks which allows her to conceive a child. She decides to write about herself and her child knowing that she had to go on and never look back. Both Tonnerre and Morag are bound together by the strength of their passion and the loneliness and the victim roles they have played and believed in.

Morag later moves to Vancouver where she gave birth to a girl, and she called her Pique. Due to their common ground, Jules decides to stay with them for two months as Pique turned five. Jules past is a liability since he had posed as a menace to the incomers. He is offended by the fact that he is being excluded from a culture which contemplates half-breeds to be inferior to the white race, both intellectually and biologically (Laurence 9). The memory of Jules childhood is painful as he recollected when his father died, he was denied a pass to the local graveyard since people were afraid that his half-breed bones would spoil their cemetery. The French-Indian had no place in the white society, and he remained in the role of being a victim.

Morag finally receives a revelation after she realizes that her ancestral home was nowhere else apart from Manawaka and that her father was Christie. It takes her most of her life with traumatic recollection as she tries to define herself (Laurence 9). Her acceptance of her inherited past finally relieves her of her conflictual relationship with her past as Jules and Morag exchanges the precious heirlooms. Morag who refuses to acknowledge Christie's existence in her life, spending years trying to be normal, (.81) the reader can notes that at the end of the novel, Morag declares that she regards him as "my father to me"(369). In addition to that, she identifies her home as "Christie's country, where I was born".( 391)

The journey that Morag undertakes leads to the victory of her odyssey. She finally acquires adequate self-preservation and transforms herself to the non-victim individual. She recognizes Christie as her father despite her early attempt to loath them and considers herself lonely. She finally started writing, turning her experience of dispossession to artistic account. She finally completes the writing of her novel (Laurence 10). She identifies herself with her past and accepts her Manawaka past as her real life and past. She divined the truth that had lied within the contradictions that she had put herself through. She finally reached the actual state of androgyny that allows her to accept and also celebrates the difference and returned home with the most profound sense of the term.

In the end, the traumatic little girl who was an orphan embraced her fate and decided what she wanted to define her life with (Laurence 12). Her victory came at a significant cost, but it was achieved and identified by Morag herself, making her divining more plausible and more acceptable

state. Morag's divinity and victory are one of the most triumphantly individualistic that Laurence has identified in her writing history (Laurence 17). There is, however, another writer who has written in the same genre regarding the traumatic childhood memories as Laurence has introduced who is Margaret Atwood.

Margaret Atwood is also a Canadian who wrote her novel, "Cat's Eye". It is about the controversial painter, Elaine Risley, the protagonist who always rejects her childhood and teenage years. She finds it hard to embrace her future as she is haunted by the traumatic memories of her childhood which make her unable to accept her identity. As she tries to go over her past and to reevaluate her story, it becomes problematic to her about the trauma that surrounded her life in Toronto. She desires to escape the torment she went through with her friends, but it turns out that she is only in the everlasting journey and was incapable to discover any sense of gratification or even well-being.

The paintings she was making became a reminder of her past, and they acted as a symbol of her ambivalent and contradictory relationships which usually led her to an infinite displacement instead of fulfillment. She was lost while she tried to find her identity which she realized could not be clutched as a whole but instead it was to be splintered in various characters which brought all the aspects of her anxious life.

The writer shows that Elaine's trauma emanates from her childhood experience back in Toronto where her family had stayed when she was young. She positioned herself to be weak and submissive, and it became a reason why she was different from other surrounding girls and had problems conforming to the feminine stereotype. Her previous life was that of a traditional nomadism with the influence of her parents. Precisely, her mother has the bad influence because she could not perform her housework duties and could not make any effort in preparing her daughter, Elaine, for socialization.

Because of what she had suffered in her childhood, Elaine is ignorant of what it entails for her to be feminine. She is neither familiar with the customs nor is she accustomed to the girl behaviors. Her friends; Carol, Cordelia, and Grace, help her to act like a girl, as they see and understand the state of being a girl-- in the sense of her being submissive, passive and having the feminine cravings. She developed worries with her anxious association with Cordelia, who seems to have an intimidating and domineering fears. Cordelia reminds Elaine of her judgmental father who censured Elaine and tries to progress her.

For Cordelia Elaine, needs a new step up. "I am not normal, I am not like other girls. Cordelia tells me so, but she will help me. . . . It will take hard work and a long time." (Atwood 62) It seems that these three girls are the only available campaign which in fact causes terror for her. These friends surround her throughout the day. They are pointing out her faults and weaknesses. They are mocking style of walking, eating, and laughing. They break her self-esteem, ostracize her, they simply saying, "bury her alive". She was submissive, "They are my friends, my girlfriends, my best friends. I have never had any before and I'm terrified of losing them. I want to please." (63)

As she tries to follow Cordelia contemptuous taunts and attempting to please her friends, she finds herself in an interjects of scorn and the feeling of worthless and being inferior. Her fear of Cordelia goes beyond repair to the point that she wishes she could become invisible (Atwood 62). This brings out the sign of anxiety, coupled with increasing detachment from her mother, a female who would show her the right path to take when dealing with girls. She finds herself in a dark abyss, and the indefinite burial in the hole stands for the height of Elaine's subservience and darkness.

Atwood depicts Elaine as a troubled girl who is faced with persecution from her cynical and contemptuous friend. She is seen as vulnerable to any attack, and she does not defend herself because her friend taught her that being a female means that she had to follow others and not lead. As they participate in an act, the three girls bury Elaine for interminably long time resulting in the sense of terror and betrayal (Atwood 126). While buried, she recalls a black square that is filled with nothing and in which there is nothing that goes away. The indication of this discovery signifies her incompetence to the verge of self-effacement.

In her paintings, Elaine pictures Cordelia with two faces, one that lurks covered with a white cloth depicting the emblem of the fluctuating power dynamics and Cordelia's real face. The white cloth covering Cordelia's face symbolizes the concealment of the instinctive childhood impulses that one can never completely control or shun away (Atwood 221). On one end Elaine seems to be very much afraid of Cordelia. Because she keeps reminding her of her fragility as she recalls her torments of breaking plates when Elaine does not adhere to her commands, she would make her suffer in the dark hole, and worse throw her hat into the forbidden ravine;" (Atwood 222).

In the height of all her traumas, she seeks for an alternative in the mythical religious figure, the Virgin Mary who provides her with the inner strength to face her demons. The trauma that Elaine had as a child navigates

through her adulthood as she tries to go through different relationships with partners in her life (Atwood 227). She associates the men with her childhood trauma as she claims that they seek to protect and destroy at the same time. As she paints the image of the falling girls, it became apparent that she was considering revenge which would mean that she was on the way of letting go of her trauma. After the incident in the ravine, Elaine decided that she could no longer be under the control of Cordelia (Atwood 228). Although she was afraid of her, she decided not to do what she commanded.

As a turning point in her relationship, she realizes that Cordelia's intimidating robust nature was an impersonation of someone who was older and that to her it was a game of socialization. It was at that point that Elaine decided to follow her path expressing her feelings in art. She is saved by her visions of the Virgin Mary during her physical and psychological weakness creating a new beginning and a new realization of who she was.

She set up another option for herself. It is a religious figure who would help her through her trauma. This religious figure provides consolation in the absence of the long-established figures and code of belief; "This is the kind of thing we do, to assuage pain," Elaine explains, and I understand. Often we are ashamed of our pain, of admitting that we were once weak enough to be hurt. Through the process of creating art, not only do we find catharsis, we also cultivate connections with others with similar pains. And with the catharsis, and with the connections, we will finally learn to move on"(Atwood 230).

She found her source of strength after identifying the fact that she needed help and in this context, her support was informed of a female idol, the Virgin Mary. Elaine paints Virgin Mary with a head of a lioness. By painting her this way, she is identifying that she is fierce and always on the alert for any imminent dangers (Atwood 230). She finally overcomes her anxieties which were associated with the process of socialization and with friendship and the symbols of darkness.

At the end of the novel, the reader can find that there is a full realization for the self-status when Elaine says, "I have said, Look. I have said, I see". She, at this point, her declaration represents her full insight of her identity. This is the author's voice appears as Elaine's. It is at this stage that she accepts her reality.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, in these two selected novels, both Atwood and Laurence have portrayed lots of sophistication as they both try to build on the concept of traumatic childhood memories and how the recovery from them can contribute in the issue of discovering one's identity. As much as both stories

emanate from a different way of description, they both highly evaluate the details of the journeys that the protagonists take, so that they can find their paths through their anxiety, worry, questions, and mistakes. Both of the characters in Atwood's and Laurence's novels have gone through childhood traumas and with difficulty parenting which greatly influenced their lives, but as the authors allow them to have the chance of recovery by maneuvering through their lives trying to get away from the grasp of fear, realization and self-blame and finally, accept their fate and embrace who they are. Childhood traumatic memories, in this regard, can act as a guide for individuals to identify themselves not through misery but through self-divinity. In this sense, the discussion reaches the point to approve and validate what the research has early hypothesized following Judith L. Herman's theory of traumatic childhood memory and the recovery from them.

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