

Wounded Subjectivity and the Reconstruction of the Self: A Comparative Study of Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* and Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

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Abstract

This article explores the construction of wounded subjectivity and the process of self-reconstruction in Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* (2015) and Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019). Both novels present individuals whose identities are shaped by experiences of trauma, violence, displacement, and emotional isolation. Although situated within different cultural and narrative contexts, both novels examine how traumatic experiences disrupt conventional understandings of identity while simultaneously creating possibilities for new forms of self-expression and human connection. Drawing on trauma theory and narrative identity theory, this study employs a comparative textual analysis to examine how Jude St. Francis and Little Dog negotiate memory, bodily suffering, familial relationships, and personal histories. The article argues that both novels portray subjectivity as a fragmented yet continuously reconstructed process rather than a fixed state of being. While Yanagihara's novel emphasizes the enduring psychological consequences of childhood trauma and the limitations of interpersonal care in overcoming profound psychological wounds, Vuong's novel presents storytelling and language as transformative practices through which inherited trauma can be confronted and reimagined. Through their representations of pain, vulnerability, and resilience, both novels challenge simplified narratives of healing and suggest that identity is continually shaped through an ongoing dialogue among memory, relationships, and self-narration. This comparative study contributes to contemporary literary discussions of trauma, identity, and representation by demonstrating how wounded subjects construct meaning within conditions of suffering and uncertainty.

Keywords: Trauma, theory, subjectivity, identity, Selfhood, Memory

1. Introduction

Contemporary literature increasingly engages with questions of identity, trauma, and memory, reflecting the complexities of human experience in an era marked by psychological uncertainty, social fragmentation, and cultural displacement. Rather than representing trauma as a singular moment of suffering, many contemporary literary works examine how traumatic experiences continue to shape subjectivity over time. The wounded self in contemporary fiction is not merely portrayed as damaged or

incomplete; instead, it emerges as a site where memory, relationships, language, and personal history intersect to produce evolving understandings of identity. Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* and Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* exemplify this literary engagement with wounded subjectivity by exploring how individuals negotiate the enduring effects of trauma while reconstructing their sense of self.

Published in 2015, Yanagihara's *A Little Life* follows the life of Jude St. Francis, a successful lawyer whose adulthood is profoundly shaped by the severe physical and emotional abuse he endures during childhood. The novel examines the lasting consequences of trauma, illustrating how violence becomes inscribed upon both the body and the psyche, ultimately influencing Jude's perception of identity, intimacy, and belonging. Despite his professional achievements and the unwavering support of devoted friends, particularly Willem Ragnarsson, Jude remains unable to escape the memories of his past. Yanagihara thus portrays trauma as a persistent psychological condition that cannot be overcome solely through external success, affection, or interpersonal care.

Similarly, Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* explores the formation of identity through the intertwined experiences of personal, familial, and historical trauma. Written as a letter from Little Dog, a Vietnamese American son, to his illiterate mother, the novel reflects on migration, war, poverty, racial discrimination, and intergenerational suffering. Unlike Jude, whose response to trauma is characterized largely by silence and emotional withdrawal, Little Dog employs language and storytelling as means of confronting painful memories and inherited histories. Through the act of writing, he transforms fragmented experiences into a narrative of self-discovery, communication, and reconciliation.

Although considerable scholarship has examined *A Little Life* and *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* independently through the lenses of trauma, identity, memory, and representation, comparative studies that investigate how both novels construct wounded subjectivity and depict the reconstruction of the self remain relatively limited. Existing criticism on *A Little Life* has primarily focused on suffering, masculinity, friendship, and the ethical implications of representing trauma, whereas studies of *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* have emphasized migration, queer identity, intergenerational memory, and the relationship between language and survival. Examining these novels together, however, reveals broader patterns in contemporary fiction's representation of trauma as an ongoing process that shapes, rather than wholly determines, personal identity.

This article argues that *A Little Life* and *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* present wounded subjectivity as a dynamic process of negotiating pain, memory, and self-formation. Through their representations of embodiment, remembrance, interpersonal relationships, and narrative expression, both novels demonstrate that identity is continuously reconstructed through encounters with trauma rather than existing as a fixed or stable condition. While Yanagihara emphasizes the enduring psychological consequences of childhood abuse and the limitations of care in overcoming profound emotional wounds, Vuong presents storytelling as a creative and transformative practice through which inherited trauma can be acknowledged, interpreted, and reimaged.

Employing a comparative textual analysis informed by trauma theory and narrative identity theory, this study examines how both novels represent wounded bodies, fragmented memories, and evolving identities. By placing these texts in dialogue, the article contributes to contemporary literary scholarship by demonstrating that trauma not only disrupts subjectivity but also creates possibilities for new forms of self-understanding, human connection, and narrative reconstruction.

2. Literature Review

Trauma studies has emerged as one of the most influential interdisciplinary fields for examining representations of suffering, memory, and identity in contemporary literature. Scholars argue that trauma cannot be understood merely as a past event. Instead, it continues to shape an individual's relationship with the self, the body, and the surrounding world. Among the foundational theorists in trauma studies, Cathy Caruth conceptualizes trauma as an experience that returns repeatedly because it has not been fully assimilated at the moment of its occurrence. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Caruth explains that trauma is characterized by belatedness, meaning that its effects become evident through recurring memories and fragmented narratives rather than through immediate understanding. This perspective offers an important framework for interpreting the experiences of Jude St. Francis and Little Dog, whose identities are continually influenced by unresolved memories that interrupt their present lives.

Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) further expands trauma discourse by examining the psychological consequences of prolonged violence and abuse. Herman identifies three essential stages of recovery: safety, remembrance, and reconnection. She argues that healing depends not only on individual resilience but also on supportive interpersonal relationships. Her framework is particularly useful for understanding both protagonists. However, *A Little Life* complicates Herman's model by portraying a character whose access to love, friendship, and emotional support does not lead to complete psychological recovery. Jude's experiences suggest that when trauma becomes deeply embedded in both identity and bodily memory, healing may remain incomplete despite the presence of genuine care and compassion.

Contemporary literary criticism increasingly approaches trauma not only as a psychological condition but also as a cultural, historical, and narrative phenomenon. Literary texts provide spaces in which marginalized voices and traumatic experiences can be represented, interpreted, and communicated in ways that ordinary discourse often cannot accommodate. Rather than simply documenting suffering, literature enables writers to explore the complexities of memory, silence, and identity through narrative form. This perspective is especially relevant to Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, where writing functions as a means of recovering suppressed family histories, confronting inherited trauma, and transforming personal pain into an act of testimony and self-expression.

The concept of narrative identity is equally important for understanding the reconstruction of self in both novels. In *Oneself as Another* (1990), Paul Ricoeur argues that identity is not a fixed essence but a dynamic process that develops through storytelling and interpretation. Individuals make sense of themselves by organizing lived experiences into narratives that give coherence and meaning to their lives. Ricoeur's theory is particularly relevant to Vuong's novel, where Little Dog reconstructs his sense of self by narrating experiences of migration, violence, family conflict, and queer identity through the act of writing. The epistolary structure allows him to transform fragmented memories into a narrative of survival, understanding, and emotional reconciliation.

Critical responses to Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* have largely focused on the novel's powerful portrayal of trauma, masculinity, friendship, and vulnerability. Scholars continue to debate whether its representation of prolonged suffering challenges conventional narratives of resilience or risks placing excessive emphasis on pain. Despite these differing perspectives, the novel remains significant for its exploration of how childhood trauma shapes adult identity, interpersonal relationships, and self-perception. Jude's wounded subjectivity demonstrates how traumatic experiences become inscribed on

both the body and the psyche, creating a lasting tension between the desire for intimacy and the fear of vulnerability.

Similarly, scholarship on Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* has examined themes of migration, racial identity, queer experience, language, and intergenerational trauma. Critics have highlighted Vuong's lyrical style and fragmented narrative structure as reflections of the nature of traumatic memory. Rather than presenting trauma through a linear narrative, the novel relies on images, recollections, and emotional associations that mirror the fragmented process of remembering. Through this narrative strategy, *Little Dog* transforms storytelling into an act of resistance against historical erasure, cultural silence, and inherited suffering.

Although existing scholarship provides valuable insights into each novel individually, a comparative reading reveals an important area that remains underexplored. Both texts portray protagonists whose identities are profoundly shaped by traumatic histories, yet they imagine different possibilities for reconstructing the self. Jude's narrative emphasizes the persistence of psychological wounds despite love and companionship, whereas *Little Dog*'s story presents language, memory, and storytelling as transformative means of negotiating inherited trauma. Examining these novels together offers a deeper understanding of how contemporary fiction represents trauma, subjectivity, and the ongoing reconstruction of identity.

3. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study employs a qualitative comparative textual analysis of Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* and Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. It relies on close reading of the primary texts to examine how trauma, memory, relationships, and narrative form contribute to the construction of wounded subjectivity and the reconstruction of identity. Rather than comparing the novels solely on the basis of thematic similarities, the study investigates how each text represents the psychological and emotional consequences of trauma through its narrative strategies, characterization, and representations of the body. The analysis is primarily informed by trauma theory and narrative identity theory. Trauma theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding how experiences of violence, abuse, displacement, and loss shape psychological development and emotional experience. Drawing on the works of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman, the study examines the relationship between traumatic memory, bodily suffering, and the challenges of recovery. These theoretical perspectives help explain Jude St. Francis's ongoing struggle with childhood trauma and *Little Dog*'s attempt to understand the personal and historical forces that shape his identity.

Narrative identity theory, particularly Paul Ricoeur's conception of selfhood as something constructed through storytelling, provides a complementary framework for examining how the protagonists negotiate their identities. Ricoeur argues that individuals develop a sense of self by interpreting and organizing their experiences into meaningful narratives. This perspective is especially relevant to *Little Dog*, whose act of writing becomes a means of making sense of memories of migration, family conflict, and inherited trauma. In contrast, Jude's inability to openly narrate his traumatic experiences contributes to his emotional isolation and fragmented sense of self, demonstrating how silence can hinder the process of identity reconstruction.

The study adopts a comparative literary approach rather than a psychological evaluation of fictional characters. Its primary focus is on the literary techniques through which both novels represent trauma and selfhood, including narrative structure, symbolism, characterization, imagery, and representations of the

body. By examining these elements comparatively, the article demonstrates that both novels challenge simplified notions of healing and present identity as a dynamic process shaped by memory, suffering, relationships, and acts of narration.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Trauma, the Body, and Wounded Subjectivity in *A Little Life* and *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

In both Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* and Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, trauma is represented not merely as a psychological experience but as a condition that becomes inscribed upon the body. The body in these novels functions as a record of suffering, carrying memories that cannot be completely erased with time. Through the experiences of Jude St. Francis and Little Dog, both authors demonstrate how traumatic events influence an individual's understanding of identity, vulnerability, and belonging.

In *A Little Life*, Jude's body becomes the primary site where his traumatic past continues to exist. Although Jude achieves professional success as a lawyer and develops meaningful friendships, his physical injuries and self-destructive behaviors reveal the continuing impact of childhood abuse. The scars on his body represent memories that remain beyond his ability to control or escape. His reluctance to discuss his past reflects the connection between trauma and silence, as the experiences that have shaped him most deeply are also the ones he finds most difficult to communicate.

Yanagihara presents Jude's wounded body as a form of traumatic memory. The physical pain he experiences in adulthood is closely connected to the violence of his childhood, creating a situation in which the past repeatedly affects the present. Jude's experiences suggest that trauma does not simply end after the original event but continues to influence how an individual understands the self. His body becomes a constant reminder of experiences he attempts to conceal from others and from himself.

The relationship between body and identity is also significant in *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. However, Vuong approaches bodily trauma through a wider framework that includes migration, race, family history, and social exclusion. Little Dog's body is shaped by multiple forms of vulnerability, including the effects of the Vietnam War, immigrant displacement, economic hardship, and racial discrimination in America. His identity develops within the intersection of personal experiences and larger historical conditions.

Unlike Jude, who often experiences his body as a source of shame and suffering, Little Dog gradually learns to understand the body as a site of memory, history, and connection. His reflections on his mother, grandmother, and Vietnamese heritage reveal that bodies carry histories beyond individual experiences. The physical and emotional wounds passed through generations become part of a larger narrative of survival and endurance.

Vuong's representation of the body is closely connected to language and storytelling. Little Dog uses writing to transform painful memories into meaningful narratives. By describing experiences of violence, poverty, and family struggles, he begins to reconsider events that were previously defined only through suffering. Through narration, the wounded body becomes a source of knowledge and understanding rather than only a symbol of damage.

The contrast between Jude and Little Dog reveals two different forms of wounded subjectivity. Jude's trauma creates emotional distance between himself and others. Despite being surrounded by people who

love and support him, he struggles to accept care because his sense of self has been deeply shaped by abuse, shame, and self-hatred. His wounds become barriers that prevent complete emotional connection. Little Dog, however, reconstructs his identity through the process of narration. His letter to his mother represents an attempt to create communication where silence has existed for generations. Although his trauma cannot be completely removed, writing allows him to negotiate his relationship with his past and understand the experiences that have shaped him. His subjectivity develops through the act of remembering, interpreting, and giving meaning to personal and collective histories.

Both novels therefore challenge traditional understandings of healing. Neither text presents recovery as a simple movement from suffering toward complete restoration. Instead, they suggest that trauma becomes part of an individual's history and must be continually negotiated. The wounded subject is not defined only by experiences of pain but also by the ongoing process of understanding, transforming, and responding to those experiences.

4.2 Memory, Silence, and the Reconstruction of Self

Memory plays a central role in both *A Little Life* and *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* because it shapes the ways in which the protagonists understand themselves and their experiences. Trauma disrupts ordinary processes of remembering, causing painful memories to return repeatedly while other experiences remain fragmented or difficult to access. Through different narrative approaches, Yanagihara and Vuong explore how individuals attempt to reconstruct their identities by negotiating their relationships with the past.

In *A Little Life*, Jude's relationship with memory is characterized by avoidance, repression, and emotional isolation. Throughout much of the novel, his traumatic history remains hidden from the people around him. Although his friends recognize that he has experienced suffering, they do not fully understand the extent of his past. This silence reflects the isolating nature of trauma, as Jude's inability to communicate his pain creates emotional distance between himself and those who care for him.

The structure of Yanagihara's novel reinforces the complexity of traumatic memory through its gradual revelation of Jude's past. Rather than presenting his experiences immediately, the narrative slowly uncovers the events that shaped his identity. This delayed disclosure reflects the difficulty of representing trauma, where painful experiences often resist direct expression and emerge through fragments over time. The reader, like Jude's friends, gradually encounters the hidden aspects of his life and the suffering that continues to influence his present.

However, the revelation of Jude's past does not result in complete recovery. Unlike traditional narratives in which confession becomes a pathway toward healing, *A Little Life* presents trauma as an experience that may continue even after it has been acknowledged. The novel questions whether love, friendship, and emotional support alone can repair the wounds caused by prolonged violence. Jude's experience suggests that certain forms of suffering become deeply connected to personal identity and cannot be easily separated from an individual's understanding of the self.

In contrast, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* presents memory as a creative and transformative process. Little Dog writes to his mother because he believes that the past must be narrated in order to be understood. His letter is not simply a collection of personal memories; it is an attempt to organize fragmented experiences into a meaningful account of identity, family, and survival.

Through writing, Little Dog revisits painful family histories while also recognizing moments of love, care, and connection. His memories of his mother and grandmother contain both suffering and affection, demonstrating that identity is formed through complex emotional relationships rather than through simple

divisions between pain and happiness. By revisiting the past, Little Dog develops a deeper understanding of the experiences that shaped both himself and his family.

The contrast between the two novels demonstrates different approaches to the relationship between memory and self-reconstruction. Jude remains deeply affected by memories that he struggles to integrate into his identity, while Little Dog transforms memory into a form of reflection and self-expression. For Jude, memory functions primarily as a source of pain and emotional confinement; for Little Dog, it becomes a means of interpretation and connection.

Both novels ultimately reveal that memory is central to the reconstruction of self. Trauma may fragment an individual's sense of identity, but narrative provides a way of negotiating those fractures. While *A Little Life* emphasizes the lasting effects of traumatic memory and the difficulty of overcoming past experiences, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* highlights the possibility of creating meaning through remembrance and storytelling. Together, the novels demonstrate that identity is continually shaped through the interaction between memory, personal history, and the search for understanding.

4.3 Love, Relationships, and the Possibility of Healing

In both *A Little Life* and *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, relationships play an important role in shaping the protagonists' understanding of themselves and their experiences. However, the two novels present different perspectives on the ability of love and human connection to overcome the effects of trauma. While both texts recognize relationships as important sources of support, comfort, and meaning, they also reveal the limitations of interpersonal care when individuals carry deeply rooted psychological wounds.

In Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life*, friendship represents one of the strongest forces attempting to counter Jude's traumatic past. The relationships between Jude and his friends, particularly Willem Ragnarsson, Malcolm Irvine, and J. B. Marion, demonstrate the importance of companionship, loyalty, and emotional attachment. Willem's relationship with Jude is especially significant because it provides him with unconditional acceptance and affection. Willem recognizes Jude beyond his physical injuries and emotional struggles, offering him a sense of belonging that contrasts with the rejection, abuse, and abandonment he experienced during childhood.

However, Yanagihara complicates the belief that love alone can completely heal trauma. Despite receiving genuine care and support from those around him, Jude continues to struggle with shame, guilt, and self-hatred. His inability to view himself as deserving of love prevents him from fully accepting the affection offered by others. Trauma has shaped his understanding of himself so deeply that external support cannot easily transform his internal sense of identity.

This aspect of the novel challenges simplified narratives of recovery in which love functions as a solution to suffering. Instead, Yanagihara presents trauma as a complex psychological reality that may continue even in the presence of meaningful relationships. Jude's experience demonstrates that emotional connection can provide comfort and companionship, but it cannot erase the lasting effects of violence and abuse.

Willem's role in Jude's life further highlights the complexity of caring for someone affected by trauma. His love for Jude is sincere, yet he cannot remove the pain that Jude carries within himself. The novel therefore shifts attention away from the idea of saving another person and toward the importance of witnessing, understanding, and accepting suffering. Love becomes an act of presence and compassion rather than a guarantee of complete recovery.

Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* presents a different understanding of relationships and healing. Although Little Dog experiences trauma through family conflict, migration, and social

marginalization, his relationships become essential to the development of his identity. His relationship with his mother, Rose, is particularly significant because it contains both emotional pain and deep affection. Their relationship reflects the complexity of family bonds shaped by love, trauma, and inherited suffering.

Little Dog's letter to his mother represents an attempt to communicate across emotional and generational boundaries. Although Rose cannot read the letter, the act of writing allows Little Dog to express feelings that have remained unspoken. Through this process, he begins to understand his mother not only as someone who has caused pain but also as an individual shaped by her own experiences of violence, migration, and trauma.

Vuong therefore presents healing as a process of recognition, empathy, and understanding. Acknowledging the suffering of previous generations does not eliminate personal pain, but it creates the possibility of breaking cycles of silence and misunderstanding. Little Dog reconstructs his identity by placing his experiences within a wider family, cultural, and historical context.

The contrast between the two novels reveals different approaches to trauma and relationships. *A Little Life* emphasizes the persistence of wounds despite love and companionship, while *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* highlights communication and understanding as possible pathways toward reconciliation. Together, the novels suggest that healing does not necessarily mean complete recovery or the disappearance of suffering. Instead, healing involves developing ways to live with painful histories while maintaining meaningful connections with others.

4.4 Narrative as Resistance and the Reconstruction of Identity

Narrative plays a central role in both novels because storytelling becomes a means through which wounded subjects attempt to understand themselves and their experiences. Both Yanagihara and Vuong demonstrate that identity is not simply discovered as a fixed reality but is continuously constructed through acts of remembering, interpreting, and communicating personal histories.

In *A Little Life*, the absence of narration becomes one of the defining characteristics of Jude's traumatic experience. His refusal to reveal his past prevents others from fully understanding the depth of his suffering and contributes to his emotional isolation. Silence functions both as a form of protection and as a source of confinement. By refusing to speak about his experiences, Jude attempts to maintain control over memories that threaten to overwhelm him. However, this silence also prevents him from integrating his traumatic past into a broader understanding of himself.

Yanagihara's representation of silence raises important questions about the relationship between trauma and storytelling. The novel suggests that certain traumatic experiences resist direct narration because they challenge an individual's ability to create a coherent account of life. Jude's fragmented sense of self reflects the difficulty of transforming traumatic memories into a stable personal narrative. His inability to narrate his suffering demonstrates how trauma can disrupt not only memory but also the process through which individuals understand their own identities.

In contrast, Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* is structured entirely around the act of narration. The novel takes the form of a letter, making storytelling the foundation of Little Dog's search for identity and understanding. Writing becomes a method of connecting the past with the present, personal experience with family history, and individual suffering with broader historical realities.

Little Dog does not write because he has completely overcome trauma; rather, he writes because trauma requires interpretation and reflection. Through language, he transforms experiences of violence, poverty, migration, and emotional struggle into a narrative that acknowledges suffering while also creating

possibilities for meaning and connection. The novel suggests that storytelling does not erase pain but allows individuals to develop a different relationship with their memories and experiences.

Vuong's poetic use of language further emphasizes the transformative potential of narrative. The fragmented structure, shifting memories, and lyrical descriptions reflect the complexity of traumatic experience itself. Instead of presenting identity as fixed or complete, the novel portrays the self as something constantly shaped and reshaped through encounters with memory, language, and relationships. The comparison between Jude and Little Dog reveals two different forms of wounded subjectivity. Jude represents an individual whose trauma remains largely unspoken, demonstrating the destructive effects of isolation and unresolved suffering. Little Dog represents an individual who uses narration as a means of negotiating trauma and developing a more complex understanding of himself and his history.

Both novels ultimately challenge the idea that identity exists separately from personal and collective experiences. Instead, they suggest that the self is formed through encounters with suffering, memory, relationships, and storytelling. The reconstruction of identity does not require forgetting trauma or escaping the past. Rather, it involves finding ways to acknowledge, interpret, and respond to experiences that have shaped one's existence.

5. Conclusion

Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* and Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* offer significant explorations of wounded subjectivity and the complex processes through which individuals reconstruct their identities after experiences of trauma. Although the novels emerge from different cultural, social, and narrative contexts, both works demonstrate that trauma is not limited to a single moment of suffering. Instead, it continues to influence how individuals understand themselves, their bodies, their memories, and their relationships with others.

Through the character of Jude St. Francis, Yanagihara presents trauma as a deeply embedded condition that shapes identity, intimacy, and self-perception. Jude's inability to escape the psychological and physical consequences of childhood abuse reveals the lasting impact of traumatic experiences. Although his relationships with Willem and his friends provide love, support, and a sense of belonging, they cannot completely remove the wounds that have become central to his understanding of himself. *A Little Life* therefore challenges simplified ideas of healing by suggesting that recovery is not always a straightforward movement toward restoration or complete resolution.

In contrast, Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* presents language and storytelling as important tools for negotiating trauma and reconstructing identity. Little Dog develops a deeper understanding of himself by transforming memories of migration, family suffering, and personal struggles into a written narrative. His letter to his mother becomes an act of communication, remembrance, and self-discovery. Although storytelling does not erase pain, the novel demonstrates that narration can create meaning from experiences of suffering and provide new ways of understanding personal and collective histories.

The comparative analysis of these novels reveals that wounded subjectivity is not defined only by experiences of damage, suffering, or victimhood. Instead, both texts present trauma as a condition through which individuals continually negotiate questions of identity, belonging, and human connection. The self emerges as a dynamic process shaped by memory, relationships, and acts of interpretation. Through different narrative approaches, Yanagihara and Vuong demonstrate that individuals affected by trauma are not defined solely by what has happened to them but also by their efforts to understand, represent, and respond to those experiences.

This study contributes to contemporary literary discussions of trauma by highlighting the relationship between suffering and self-formation. It demonstrates how contemporary fiction provides important spaces for examining the ways marginalized and wounded voices negotiate identity in relation to personal and collective histories. Future research may further explore representations of trauma in contemporary literature through perspectives such as gender studies, disability studies, migration studies, and queer theory to examine additional dimensions of wounded subjectivity, memory, and resilience.

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