

# The Silenced Narrator and the Notion of “Proto-Narrative”

---

Biti, Marina; Rosanda Žigo, Iva

Source / Izvornik: **SAGE Open**, 2021, 11, 1 - 9

Journal article, Published version

Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020988522>

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:186:007213>

Rights / Prava: [Attribution 4.0 International](#)/[Imenovanje 4.0 međunarodna](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-07-11**




Repository / Repozitorij:

[Repository of the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences - FHSSRI Repository](#)



# The Silenced Narrator and the Notion of “Proto-Narrative”

SAGE Open  
January-March 2021: 1–9  
© The Author(s) 2021  
DOI: 10.1177/2158244020988522  
journals.sagepub.com/home/sgo  


Marina Biti<sup>1</sup> and Iva Rosanda Žigo<sup>2</sup> 

## Abstract

Narrative voices in Ismet Prcić’s memoir/novel “Shards” are many; this article primarily focuses on what we refer to as the voice of the “silenced narrator” that appears to speak from a deep (“subdiegetic”) narrative level shaped by the unconscious workings of traumatic experience. Starting from psychological insights into traumatic states (Elbert and Schauer, Hunt, Crossley, etc.) and tracing the encoded symptoms of this illness across the text, the discussion moves on to a theoretical level to investigate notions proposed by authors such as Genette (to discuss narrative levels), Ricœur (in examining the construction of self), Caruth (in evaluating narrative implications of the literary voicing of trauma), Antonio Damasio (in exploring the source and the nature of the trauma-related destruction of the narratively voiced “I”), and others. These are used to establish the concept of a narrative subject whose voice emerges from the deep zone of their “proto-self” (Damasio), to be weaved into a distinctive narrative form that we will refer to as “proto-narrative.”

## Keywords

trauma, memory, language, narrative voice, diegesis, identity

“Memories are nothing like tapes. Tapes record reality. Minds record fiction. My mind was never one for remembering things right. Too much fantasy. Too much muggy past.”

—Ismet Prcić, *Shards* (2011)

## Introduction

In this article, we will explore modes of narration, with a special focus on the expression of trauma as experienced and narratively developed by Ismet Prcić in his memoir/novel “Shards.” On one side, we will observe the narrator’s self-imposed task to put his traumatic memories into perspective and use narrative techniques to reestablish his damaged notion of self. On the other side, we will observe a contrasting narrative activity that predominantly focuses on the imaginative reshaping of those same memories, deeply affected by the author’s/narrator’s/character’s experience of war in his native Bosnia. In dealing with the hybrid nature of the genre, and of the narrative itself, we will be largely pre-occupied with the shifting of the narrative voice across diverse diegetic levels (Genette, 1980), thus introducing both complementary and disparate, sometimes confusingly intermingling narrative perspectives.

Memoirist framing of experience presupposes a certain level of willful separation between the act of narration and the narrated events. For the large part of his book, Prcić

undertakes such a journey and builds his story in a narratively active voice, clearly positioning his character in the role of the heterodiegetic narrator. Sporadically yet notably, the narrator sometimes also assumes a greater level of distance from the character and the events, enabling an extradiegetic voice of a narrator in the first degree to take over and enabling it at moments to hide, as in the extradiegetic–heterodiegetic paradigm described by Genette (1980). However, in contrast to all this, and especially as the narrative progresses, the narrator moves more and more away from the objectivist memoirist approach, allowing entrance to the imagery that blurs, to the point of elimination, the line between the real and unreal. As the novel progresses, an intradiegetic voice increases in presence, undermining the memoirist frame and claiming the narrative “I” from both the author/narrator and the character. The opening of this deeper level of subjectivity also opens the door to trauma that sometimes causes the narrative “I” to disappear and turn into “you,” and does so, in some instances, even at the cost of disrupting narrative coherence. This garnishes the memoir

<sup>1</sup>University of Rijeka, Croatia

<sup>2</sup>University North, Koprivnica, Croatia

## Corresponding Author:

Iva Rosanda Žigo, University North, Trg dr. Žarka Dolinara 1, 48000 Koprivnica, Croatia.

Email: irosandazigo@unin.hr



with elements of an obscure internal reality that seems to be fully submerged within the experience of trauma.

The complexity of the narrative structure that involves not only multiple levels of diegesis and various diegetic combinations discussed by Genette but also an unusual correlation between verifiable reality and fiction invites theoretical speculation primarily concerning elements that can be qualified as “disruptive” to the memoir, related to trauma. We will, therefore, explore the actual, diagnosed mental state of the character—the posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—and attempt to trace narratively detectable symptoms of the character’s/narrator’s illness across the text, as to shed light on the transgressive power of trauma that affects both the form and the content of the overall narrative, and on the ability of trauma to garnish narrative reality with “realities” that it creates in the mind of a traumatized subject. Leaning on psychological insights into traumatic states (Elbert and Schauer, Hunt, Crossley), the discussion will move on in three main directions, using theories of authors such as Paul Ricœur—to gain insight into the construction of self, Cathy Caruth—to evaluate narrative implications of the literary voicing of trauma, and Antonio Damasio—to explore the source and the nature of the trauma-related destruction of the narratively voiced “I,” and others, as to propose the notion of a silenced narrative subject voiced from the deep zone of their “proto-self” (Damasio, 1999) and expressed in the form of “proto-narrative.”

### Tracing the PTSD Code

In one of the letters to his mother, Ismet, the character and the narrator in “Shards,” who escaped the war in Bosnia to become a refugee in America, informs his mother of his nightmares, mentioning that he turned for help to a certain doctor Cyrus who diagnosed him with PTSD. The doctor prescribed him sedatives and suggested that he should start writing his memoir as a form of self-therapy. The explicit reference to the diagnosis, as well as numerous references to its connectedness with the act of writing, make Ismet’s PTSD an autoreferential marker and also a logical point of departure when confronting the intricacies of Prcić’s redoubled, and often even doubly redoubled narrative.

In accepting to write, Ismet, soon found himself stumbling into a “memory crisis,” unable to keep the real apart from the unreal. He turned to doctor Cyrus again to discuss the (un) truthfulness of confabulations that seemed to be “sneaking into” his writing. Doctor Cyrus’s explanation “that our brains are peculiar computers that constantly augment and even edit true events out of our memory when those events do not fit into the narrative that we tell to ourselves every day, the narrative of our own lives” (Loc. 328) satisfied Ismet and led him to accept it as a license to open the reality’s door to fiction. From that point on, Ismet-the-character felt free to surrender to his urge to overcome the stinginess of bare factuality and to challenge Ismet-the-narrator to allow the narrative to take its

own, sometimes unpredictable course, as to abide by the logic of Ismet’s first and foremost cause: his dedication to a “truer” version of the truth.

It is notable that the doubt which Ismet expressed, much like his urge to submit to the imagination, are both very much in line with the problem “of choice, of discrimination, and sometimes of predicament of conflict as concerns the remembrance of the past,” that is, with the core issue of self-representation (Suleiman, 2010, p. 93) typical of trauma, that Ismet seems to be struggling within his attempt to find a remedy for his mental pain in course of the creative process of writing. Ismet’s explorative journey takes off from the idea of the treatment that has a lot in common with the healing-oriented narrative practices as understood within the framework of the so-called “Narrative Exposure Therapy” (NET)—a “treatment approach” developed by Maggie Schauer, Thomas Elbert, and Frank Neuner that focuses specifically on PTSD and invites construction of a narration of a patient’s life that seeks to open pathways to “emotions, cognitions, physiology, behavioural and sensory elements, and meaning content” associated with traumatic events, in concurrence with a recall of positive life experiences. While writing, however, Ismet faces the problems of “coherence, control and integration” (Schauer et al., 2011, p. 34) that he strives to achieve, as he is at the same time reliving numerous psychophysiological and psychosocial manifestations of his condition. These penetrate the narrative to form a network of signals that, in a literary form that surpasses the initial therapeutic task, encode his illness and make it traceable across the book.

Hence, it is relevant to be aware that PTSD, caused by a traumatic experience stored but not actively dealt with in the autobiographical memory, alters the functioning of the medial temporal lobe structures (Elbert & Schauer, 2002) and can thus be said to affect the patient mentally and, in indirect ways, also physically. The symptoms of this illness include

re-experiencing intrusions through nightmares and flashbacks—moments of recollection so intense that the victims believe themselves to be back amid the atrocities; exaggerated startle response and sustained preparedness for an instant alarm response (hyperarousal); difficulty in calming down or falling asleep; and active avoidance of places where danger was previously experienced, and/or passive avoidance marked by an avoidance of thoughts or feelings related to the traumatizing event. (Elbert & Schauer, 2002, p. 883)

It can also come through as a disbalance between verbally and situationally accessible memory (VAM and SAM), which is sometimes referred to as “cold” and “hot” memory (Schauer et al., 2011), or explicit/declarative and implicit/nondeclarative memory, as it is more often termed in cognitive psychology. The patients are often unable to match obsessively present sensory data (movements, sounds, and other stimuli that instigate associations and emotions of fear) with adequate verbal counter values, which can, in more

severe cases, result in “dissociation, de-realization, depersonalization or persecutory delusions” (Elbert & Schauer, 2002, p. 883). The condition also produces a deforming influence on various mental functions that contribute to the shaping of patients’ perception of new events, resulting in a biased distribution of attention or a loss of contact with fundamental beliefs acquired before the traumatic event, all this making the world seem an unpredictable and a highly dangerous place. This can be manifested also as forgetfulness, difficulties with controlled retrieval of the trauma memory (intrusive reexperiencing of the trauma and inability to recall aspects of the trauma), hypervigilance to a perceived threat, and poor concentration (Vasterling & Lippa, 2014). Patients are furthermore prone to depression and tend to apply dysfunctional cognitive strategies while attempting to cope with their problems and can become susceptible to alcohol or other substances (Greene et al., 2018) and/or even suicide. Most of these symptoms seem to correspond with Ismet’s state and have been encoded into the novel.

Indications of Ismet’s traumatized state of mind create alerts rather early in the novel but are likely to be confirmed and acknowledged as actual symptoms of his illness only upon their repeated resurfacing, as the narrative progresses. They are present in the intimate sections of Ismet’s diary; in his inner conversations with his mother, written in form of letters; and in the chapters in which Ismet expresses his thoughts and feelings with incomplete references to events, leaving queries and gaps for the readers to decipher or fill. As there are also large parts of the book which are narrated smoothly, one is required to engage in a “double reading” that can be matched to reduplications of voices and motifs on different levels of the novel.

The sensory plane of the narrative foregrounds a polyphony of voices, decked with more sounds, and accompanied by images. There is a lot of crying, groaning, pounding, whining, creaking, buzzing, and murmuring that often seem to arrive from inside rather than from outside, sometimes sounding “like someone went through your intestinal tubing with a blowtorch” (Loc. 4529), and at other times as if the sounds, once heard, resurface from the past to become a part of the present. Also, on the sensory plane, visuality often disintegrates into abstraction as past and present impressions mix and war motifs force their way through in a flow of thought that tends to liberate itself from the strict rules of language. The mixture of coherence and incoherence that often foregrounds sensory experience may be said to point to a postmodern attitude to writing, but it also, and by all means no less, provides a pathway into Ismet’s cognitive mode, where the predominantly sensory perception of the past gets to be reproduced in the perception of the ongoing reality, disassociating itself from language (Hunt, 2010, p. 119) and calling in the notion of traumatic memory.

Numerous other indicators of PTSD adhere to the neuropsychological and neurocognitive descriptions of the phenomenon, such as the increased activity of implicit or

situational memory that activates recollections by using associative trails: frequently actuated flashbacks, false memories, associative cross-overs from one place to another, and from the present into the past. Such a process was once activated by the Bosnian word *mati* (meaning: “mother”) recorded on Ismet’s answering machine, when that single word led to a disturbing flashback and brought on the sensation of fear of an oncoming tragedy. The (i)logical superstructures to situational/sensory stimuli act to transform random spatial or temporal connections, bringing about “hypervigilance to a perceived threat” and highlighting Ismet’s inability to distinguish any experienced event from himself as the subject of experience. On top of all that, Ismet appears to feel guilty simply for being alive and for having the ability to see, hear, breathe, or talk/write about matters of life, this burden polluting his perception of reality with an exhausting, ever-present sense of not belonging.

Ismet finds himself frantically searching for possible routes of escape from his mental prison, such as attempting to lose himself in the consumption of alcohol that he also mixes with prescription tablets. Again, he staggers, becoming unable to “stave off the thought swarms, the brain chatter” (Loc. 1090), and feeling disoriented in his past as well as in the present. He also engages in the idea of suicide, which, in some sickly and ironically intimate way, makes him feel close to his mother who tried to take her own life on multiple occasions. However, his notion of death, much like many others that besiege him, is packed with ambiguities. Would it be possible to shoot a bullet into his head and end up doing away with the wrong Ismet? Would he, if he shot himself, remain on his feet, left to witness the death of his counterpart?

Amid all this, we also read about Mustafa, Ismet’s shadow, separate and merged with him. Depicted initially as “someone else,” Mustafa is a character whose thoughts and memories interfere with Ismet’s, and his invocation into the text transports the narrative to the external boundary of memoirist prose, resulting in the redoubling of the genre itself. Reference to Mustafa is mostly made facelessly, in a third-person mode, yet as the novel progresses, the distance between Mustafa and Ismet diminishes and the mysterious character whose fate besieges Ismet becomes infiltrated into the pages of Ismet’s diary and the letters to Ismet’s mother, and finally into mother’s letter to Ismet, putting Mustafa on the spot of Ismet’s abandoned life of the past.

From a literary point of view, Mustafa can be seen as a metaleptic creature that stems out of the field of postmodern poetics, although he at the same time appears to be a reflection of Ismet’s “false memory” (Linden, 2013)—a strange, strayed product of the interactional development of self and a narrative representation of the interrelatedness of “self” and the language. He is used in the novel as Ismet’s “looking glass self” (in the sense of the term as used by Michele L. Crossley in a discussion referring to George Mead)—the part that rises to autonomy through the traumatic separation of

“I” “which perceives, acts, speaks, and feels” from the “me” “which was the ‘I’ at an earlier time” (Crossley, 2000, p. 12). The objectification of “I” in course of which the interactional “me,” related to self, is extracted from self and transformed into a separate narrative entity (“he”), to be developed and furnished with an autonomous identity and a life story that contains hidden links to the original “I,” places Mustafa into the very center of trauma-related signals that emerge from a single source—Ismet’s PTSD.

### Reduplications and the (De) Construction of Self

“If a person becomes a refugee, then there will be a significant environmental and psychosocial impact. People who become refugees are often damaged more by their arrival and reception in the new country than they are by the events they witnessed or experienced in their homeland,” says Hunt (2010, p. 59). This observation certainly applies to Ismet, as his arrival in America constituted a turning point in his life that triggered his need to create a reduplicated version of himself. That new character, needed to fill the gap between Ismet’s past and his present, could only be assembled from “shards” of Ismet’s actual memories, and the inevitable cracks could only be filled with elements of fiction.

To gain credibility, Ismet’s invented counterpart was not only to fill the void that opened wide in Ismet’s present; he also needed to be reinserted into his past. Hence, Mustafa’s story is told, piece by piece, throughout “Shards,” making the reader aware of his presence and causing him to ponder on the character’s relevance from the beginning of the book. The character lingers, functionally unexplained, with an occasional hint regarding his possibly verifiable roots and reasons for his presence. Such hints, sometimes even contradictory, are provided in intersections, via brief mentions or, sometimes, via entire passages, and most often via ambiguities and allusions that build up into a mystical code which the reader is bound to try to break. Mustafa’s and Ismet’s interconnectedness remains unfinished and open to different interpretations to the very end, making this aspect both mystical (inspiring awe regarding the mind’s unperceivable intricacies) and mysterious (unfolding in the direction of many possible conclusions, much like in a thriller). Amid all the possible speculations, Mustafa is for the larger part understood as Ismet’s “doppelgänger”—a ghostly presence and a product of Ismet’s traumatic need to distance his memories from himself and assign them to some imagined version of his self.

The clone theory sometimes feeds on Mustafa’s unexpected appearances in places that Ismet had previously visited, and interactions with people with whom Ismet had interacted (e.g., the episode in Edinburgh), and sometimes on the direction of speech, through questions Ismet asks himself. These are often delivered in the third person (such as “Why does Mustafa have my memories?”), yet the answers

come in the first person (“I think I wanted him to be alive”; Loc. 4835). Who is the “I” and who is the “he,” we may wonder? Such internal dialogues are in themselves reduplicative, made only more confusing by the hypotheticals that surround them. The delusional nature of the created imagery may lead us to address notions that pertain to the field of psychopathology, such as the one of an imagined twin or “invisible doppelgänger” that can involve an actual belief of a person that they are a clone of some real person (Politis & Loane, 2012, p. 228). As Mustafa also appears to be everywhere, sometimes even connecting two places at the same time, we might even be led to associate him with the so-called “reduplicative misidentification syndromes (RMS)” characterized by a “subjective conviction of an individual, that a place, person or event is duplicated” (Politis & Loane, 2012, p. 337) while also noting that the RMS has been known to take the form of “chimeric assimilation”—when two places are believed to be merged into one—or of “extravagant spatial localization”—when a place is believed to be elsewhere than it is.

Besides Mustafa, the “doppelgänger,” and besides place reduplications, there is neither a lack of chimeric-like mergers or extravagant displacements in the novel. However, it seems also appropriate to point out that elements of paramnesia can be found, sporadically and unsystematically, in cases of acute stress and trauma (Linden, 2013), just as it has long been known that a sense of reduplication can penetrate the daily routines of “normal” people (Smith, 1913) who sometimes experience sensations of blurring of the reality that trigger associative mechanisms for reasons such as excitement, exhaustion, or merely a momentary distraction of attention. This is when the objective mode gets to be replaced by a subjective one, and a past impression can bring about a momentary sensation of reduplication, which is usually referred to as “*déjà vu*.” Hence, the presence of reduplicative phenomena does not in itself imply that Ismet’s case ought to be understood in terms of reduplicative paramnesia as described in some textbook of psychopathology. It does, however, mean that an understanding of this psychopathological phenomenon can be put to use in the process of reading and interpreting Ismet and the narrative techniques that Prcić used to depict the painful process of his character’s reconstruction of self that so heavily leans on his creation of Mustafa.

While the character whom we got to know early on, in his home town of Tuzla, is delivered, mimetically speaking, as a reflection of Prcić’s true, or original self, a reconstruction of his self would have become a psychological necessity once his departure from Tuzla was initiated, as he ventured into the unknown. As this journey commenced, a transformative process was set in motion to enable Ismet to deal with the challenges of his unforeseeable future, thus also transporting the character onto a new mimetic level. The suddenness of the change, and the uncertainty that it brought about, made even scarier by the stressful circumstances of war, made the

process of self-reconstruction no easy task. Inevitably, cracks between Ismet's "original" self and the self in the making appeared, bringing about a destabilizing dynamic in the character's self-perception that marked the entire journey. This transported the character onto a second mimetic level and opened the doors for an imagined character to step in. And indeed, with the triggering of Ismet's PTSD at the time of his arrival in America, Mustafa also came to life, to become Ismet's surrogate self.

As Mustafa's presence intensified, Ismet found himself on yet another, the third level of mimesis, ruled by the principles of refiguration and (dis)ability to assemble himself from fragments. At that point, he was bound to lose touch with his original self, lost to the country, and to the war that he had fled from. He found himself in America, no longer knowing who he was, and, indeed, if he still existed as the person that he once had been, two mimetic levels ago. At this point, he feels that he needs to deconstruct himself completely if he is to reconstruct himself at all. The challenge is great, and his PTSD soars.

The plot hence evolves across three levels of mimesis, and as we move from a prior level to the next, narrative strategies are also affected, bringing forward a voice that seems to separate from the character, though in effect the character is still there, largely reduced to a medium across which the voice of trauma assumes its resonance. Although the progression that led him across different mimetic levels appears to be unfolding chronologically, the reconstruction of his self takes him back and forth through time and exposes him to a misleading mirror effect. This is because Ismet's configured "present" cannot but lead him in the backward direction, against the logic of life in which the present and the past are used as a base upon which the subjects configure their future (Brnčić, 2007, p. 733). However, Ismet's future seems all too obscure, and this keeps him heavily involved with his past. He narrates it and refigures it, with a destabilizing effect on his identity. His quest for stability appears to be shattered by the very figure—Mustafa—that he invented in his attempt to stabilize.

Ismet is, factually speaking, still who and what he was, yet as such he feels not to belong, which makes him unacceptable to himself. This enables Mustafa—his *ipse*—to emerge as the missing element, an addition to his *idem*. The two parts, both *ipse* and *idem*, are needed for a subject to obtain a fully fledged notion of self (Ricoeur, 1992), yet these parts fail to merge. The interplay between Ismet's *ipse* and *idem*, narratively developed into an interplay between Ismet and Mustafa, confirms, in fact, the Ricoeurian view on a subject's disability to assess one's self in the present moment, and of a necessary lapse in time in the process of self-assessment that needs to be bypassed by the subject's mind for a subject to assume their identity. In Ismet's case, that lapse is far too great and much too deeply affected by trauma, for the bypass to come into effect. He cannot let go of Mustafa, yet he cannot integrate the character into himself either, which is

why he keeps interacting with him and which is also why confabulation becomes a necessity in the process.

However, Mustafa, in the novel, represents more than a mere missing piece of Ismet's identity. This is not only because of scattered hints of him possibly being the half-brother whom Ismet had never met but also because he is voiced as the ambiguous, contradictory "other" within Ismet's self—a stranger and a brother, foreign and intimately close at the same time, representing both the destructiveness and the nobility of all those *others* who stayed behind in Bosnia to fight and suffer on different sides of the war, the violent and the honorable side of Ismet's native country. This internalized and internally reduplicated *other* has much to do with Ismet's perception of Bosnia, divided within itself—with all the heroes who remained on its battlefields to fight for their beliefs and their lives, yet engaging also in senseless destruction of the unity of difference that Bosnia once represented to *all* Bosnians, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or location on the country's map. Both sides to this symbol can only inspire disturbing feelings, either of guilt or of grief. So Ismet grieves or feels guilty, or both. He is a fugitive from home, but his home is also a place of violence and pain. The concept is haunting, and again, destructive to Ismet's perception of himself. It is the ideals that we have, the role models we follow, and the norms we respect that are the backbone to our identity, says Ricoeur (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 121), whereas Ismet has only Mustafa as a symbolic reference to his broken ideals, to the models he strayed away from, and to the norms he defied. And that is why Mustafa cannot ever annul Ismet's sense of emptiness; he can only augment it.

Mustafa, as *the other*, represents Bosnia in the state of war and Ismet's private trauma at the same time. As Ismet's traumatic void increases, Mustafa's ability to take over becomes greater, whereas the "original" Ismet practically disappears. Therefore, Ismet's vision gradually becomes Mustafa's vision, his voice—Mustafa's voice. The gradual increase in Mustafa's presence can be traced across Ismet's letters to his mother, culminating in a single letter written by the mother and addressed to her son in which she calls him by Mustafa's name. This is also the point in the narrative in which Ismet's identity is reduced to shambles: We witness him helpless against trauma as it destroys his language and as it steals his voice. It is perhaps the very destruction of the original Ismet that might, in some aftermath of the novel, also enable him to find his way out of trauma and to claim his voice back, but this can only be a matter of speculation that falls outside the realms of this discussion.

## When Trauma Speaks

There is a chapter in "Shards," dedicated to doctor Cyrus, entitled ". . . a full minute of everything, for cyrus . . ." (Loc. 4794–4829). In this chapter, the narrated content is presented in torn outlines. Punctuation is omitted, leaving its parts free to migrate and confusingly contaminate meanings. This

chapter, much like some other paragraphs toward the end of Preci's novel, lacks clear correspondence between utterances and meanings. Fragments are piled up upon fragments, sensations upon sensations, with no textual hierarchy or organization that might help a reader establish referential relations to a reality behind the speech itself. To add to the confusion, the character is not voiced as "I," but referred to as "you," and this "you" kicks, screams, and struggles as if overtaken by some higher force. The "you"—"the being watching you dreaming you inventing you on the spot"—seems to be spinning out of control and trying to invoke some creature with a will, from a parallel plane, while its own ability to speak or to act seems reduced to panting and moving, its thinking functions obscured or perhaps even temporarily disabled.

We are likely, upon struggling with the text, to figure out that the chaotic flow of words revolves around the fact that Ismet's phone had rung ("screamed"), that Ismet finally did pick it up, and that the caller was not his ex-girlfriend Melissa. However, before putting together this nonevent that appears to have triggered a mighty stream of the uncontrolled sounding of the language, the reader will battle with particles of untraceable other events, past and present, and with unpleasant sensations that seem to pertain to a haunting notion of "something else," all of which standing in the way of any kind of coherence.

The form of speech that we are confronted with in this chapter escapes any common notion of speech. The utterances are given in a way that may remind us of electroencephalography: They seem to record random somatosensory stimuli, although in a strange verbal form. It is therefore legitimate to ask, "What narrative mechanism can such a 'recording' be attributed to?" Furthermore, *whose* voice are we "hearing"?—is it of the character or the narrator? Are they or are they not the same, or is there some third voice involved in this, perhaps—the "voice of the wound"?

The syntagm used in the above paragraph is borrowed from "the story of a wound that cries out," as Cathy Caruth put it (Caruth, 1996, p. 4) in her account of the double tragedy of Tancred who unknowingly killed his lover, only to wound her again when slashing a tree in which her soul was imprisoned, causing the tree to cry out in the voice of his beloved. This motif from Tasso's "Gerusalemme Liberata" was first discussed by Freud who used it to point to the repetitive nature of traumatic experience in his essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920). Freud saw repetition as the essence of the phenomenon that he termed as "traumatic neurosis." Caruth, in contrast, sees the notion of the "crying wound" "not only as the enigma of a human agent's repeated and unknowing acts" but also as "the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know." Caruth then went on to draw a further parallel between literature and the psychoanalytic theory, as "literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relationship between knowing and not knowing," which causes "the language of

literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience" to intersect (Caruth, 1996, p. 3).

While literature and theory indeed do intersect, enabling, each from its angle, the "voice of the wound" to be heard and/or interpreted, it is the witnessing status attributed to that voice that may be disputed. Testimony cannot fall short of narration, even if imperfect and even if unsound. But we may well wonder if a cry, as such, constitutes narration, and who might, in that case, be the narrator? In the quoted example, neither Clorinda, who is dead and said to be imprisoned in the tree, nor Tancred, whose pain reduces him to speechlessness, is in a position to deliver any kind of narrative, let alone explanatory speech that could be defined as testimony. A sound is heard, and Tancred interprets it, thus translating it into speech. Yet, was there any speech at all, or did trauma-stricken Tancred only imagine it?

It seems rather clear that the "crying wound" is an expression of Tancred's pain and, factually speaking, that it was triggered by a sound that brought about his evocation of Clorinda's suffering, as well as his suffering from guilt. As such, it has the performative power to impress, but not the power to testify or to explain itself via language. The "voice of the trauma emerging from the wound itself" (LaCapra, 2014, p. 182) is body-bound; it resonates inside of Tancred's head, constituting an inner articulation of the relived experience of Clorinda's death, and the resounding of the original trauma. This is why it is indeed repetitive, which still does not make it a testimony "to the role of the victim as witness in addressing the 'perpetrator' with reference to (making him hear for the first time a cry that bespeaks) a past that in this case, he has unknowingly repeated in its violence" (LaCapra, 2014, p. 182). However, what seems to be mentally heard and seen gets to be translated by Tancred—and indeed, by theorists—into speech, although the verbal recording of sensations can only provide *evidence* that points to Tancred's state of mind, that is, to the way his act of slashing a tree is *perceived as speech*. This evidence is truly moving, and it enables the reader to *imagine* the crying tree and to relate to Tancred's prior experience that caused him to associate meanings to an externally perceived sound. We are hence furnished only with the *evidence of his trauma* provided in the form of a narratively recorded symptom of Tancred's traumatized body/mind state. In submitting to the effect that it has on us, we need to be aware that it is the literary mode of writing, and not a speaking subject, that allows the readers to "hear" the unhearable and furnish it with meanings while empathizing with Tancred's pain.

The crying sound is, furthermore, a sign, an indexical one that does not reveal its source, but rather provides hints to its discovery. It seems that LaCapra himself came close to "Caruth's variant of . . . language" (LaCapra, 2014, p. 186) in the sense that he imported expressions such as "witnessing" and "the voice of a trauma emerging from the wound itself" while at the same time striving to free his language of the repetitive bias that he observed in Caruth's writing. This

shows that the repetitive trap does not only pertain to “the distinction between writing trauma and writing about trauma” (or to a lack of such a distinction) but more so to the metaphorical nature of the language itself that gives rise to conceptual blends that can, among else, bring together and merge objects and subjects of speech. Hence, the analytical relevance of the distinction between “witnessing” (as subject activity, that is, *narrative*) and “evidence” (as an object of that activity, that is, *meaning* extracted from the narrative context, to be subjected to interpretation).

Apparently, the trauma may “steal” or “borrow” a subject’s voice; in “Gerusalemme Liberata,” it stole the voice of Clorinda, or so Tancred seems to think, in his trauma-stricken state. Yet, neither Clorinda nor the tree can speak, and although Tancred is silently submitting to the process of traumatic association, his subject position is destroyed—so neither he is speaking. There is, in fact, no voice, but only associative imagery at work. It seems that it is the very “speechlessness of trauma” (Neuner et al., 2018, p. 185) that is captured via the literary refiguration of the traumatic event. The silence is evocative and mournful, packed with traumatic memories; it erupts into the language via refiguration that gets to be recorded within and across the narrative medium. “The voice of the wound” is therefore the voice of a silenced, trauma-possessed narrator, that emerges through the diegetic loop and forms itself into a meaning beyond the subject’s ability to control it. That deeply inward and ghostly “voice” is but a vibration of the imagery that reflects the subject’s delusional state, that surfaces in substitution to his silenced voice.

Much the same can be said of Ismet’s speech in the formerly mentioned paragraph. Does he even speak, or are we *reading* and imagining to be hearing voices that are echoing in the head of the character, and furnishing them with meanings in the process? Indeed, most likely, the latter. Ismet is “hearing” his storm from within, the sounding of his body-bound sensations, while *we*, as readers, act as witnesses to his state. The only actual sound to be heard was that of the phone that rang, causing the subject’s associative mechanisms to run wild and noisy, and be transformed into a chain of mutually unrelated signifiers. Readers, much like the character, “hear” the unhearable—the internalized sounding of Ismet’s traumatic reliving of his separation from Melissa, and—at a deeper level—from his home country. The character himself is alienated from what he thinks he is hearing and from what he appears to be saying. He is not in control of the language that we, in testimony to a literary text, tend to attribute to him: He cannot stop, alter, or fix the flow, let alone master it, reshape it, or explain it.

This “voice” hence appears to transgress the very notion of voice, as it delivers “speech” from beyond the conscious level of the narrator’s self. The narrative, dominated by traumatic memories, takes shape of a recording of a sensory experience that points to the subject’s loss of awareness and of his loss of control over the narrative content. Words are

being used in their signaling function and, in consequence, they enable the reader to see/hear what only the subject locked in the world of trauma may be deluded to see or to hear. Can this still be said to be intradiegesis? Intradiegetic narrative may also be “inward” (Genette, 1980, p. 231), but appears to be so oriented in a less radical sense of the word, seeing that it expresses, within a range of variations, a “difficult experience of relating to oneself with (slight) distance and off-centering” (Genette, 1980, p. 249). The voice of an intradiegetic narrator may hence be shattered by the free wandering of thought, yet not completely separated from the narrative “I” that maintains contact with itself and with the world, however loose that contact may be. However, when trauma—a state, an “it”—assumes control over the subject and their narrative, the narrative “I” sinks beyond that contact, into delusionality, reducing the narrative voice to a sub-diegetic “gurgle,” or perhaps an imaginative “flash” or a “bleed.” In cases such as Ismet’s, or Tancred’s, the subject of speech may therefore indeed appear to be—the wound.

### The Voicing of “A Catcher Created in the Narrative of the Catching Process”

In returning to the “wounds that speak,” we may seem to be returning to the previously discussed metaphorical trap that LaCapra warned against. Indeed, figurative language, although seductive and even useful in highlighting certain aspects of the discussion, can also be said to conceal its basic presumptions, or perhaps a lack of them. On the contrary, a simple replacement of a figure of speech with a newly coined theoretical term (such as “subdiegesis”) will make us no wiser if the notion is not examined further, concerning its causes. In search of a path that might lead us there, it may be, however, worthy to note that both expressions, while differing as they do, refer to human pain, which is, in itself, implicative of a disruption in the relationship between the mind and the body that causes the pain to be felt and creates a need for it to be expressed.

What do we know of expressions of pain? There is much to be learned from a study on the *making* and *unmaking* of pain, authored by Elaine Scarry (Scarry, 1985), in which she discusses the topic across an array of pressing social contexts that she analyzes across abundant literary exemplification. How human beings confront, deal with, or avoid dealing with pain appears to have much to do with the poor “shareability of pain” and its “resistance to language” (Scarry, 1985, p. 8). The meaning of pain, due to its unavailability to direct sensory confirmation of other people’s body-bound experience, “may seem as distant as the interstellar events referred to by scientists who speak to us mysteriously of not yet detectable intergalactic screams” (Scarry, 1985, p. 3). The difficulty can also be attributed to the lack of direct linguistic referents to the all too diverse and all too personal notions of pain. This is further reflected in the propositionally limited and inwardly oriented “grammar of pain” that



resists objectification, thus leading the speakers into the blind alleys of their subjectivity rather than in the direction of the external world, inhabited by others. As Scarry points out, “love is love of JC, fear is fear of v, ambivalence is ambivalence about z,” and “if one were to move through all the emotional, perceptual, and somatic states that take an object—hatred for, seeing of, being hungry for—the list would become a very long one” as opposed to speaking of pain which “takes no object” (Scarry, 1985, p. 5), but rather, transforms the subject of speech into an object. Hence, speakers usually revert to a standardized set of figurative generalizations, relatable—in broader terms, to everybody’s experience, yet to no one’s uniquely: metaphors (e.g., “burning pain” or “sharp pain” refer to fires and knives), metonymies (e.g., “life-altering pain” describes the effects, rather than the pain itself), and personifications (e.g., “scary pain,” as in “scary person”). Such language introduces notions related to pain, to speak of pain indirectly; interestingly, it also reveals the threefold—sensory, cognitive, and affective—nature of the phenomenon.

The pain comes from within, yet the more we pull away from the outer world toward our inner selves, the more we are out of touch with the language used in the social sphere; the greater the pain, the more unsocial the effect. As pain increases, it also increasingly affects the human capacity to speak, reducing the language to utterances such as moaning, or wailing, or perhaps muttering. At that point, one descends into “oneness,” that is, into the neural reality of one’s own body, one’s sense of selfhood, essential to social contact, shattered or even destroyed. The language may gradually return, with the pain becoming more bearable, or perhaps disappearing. There appears to be a temporal dimension to this process that spans across the separation of the “I” submerged in the body, analogous to the notion of “identity as ‘sameness’ (idem),” and the “I” that speaks, pointing to the notion of “identity as ‘selfhood’ (ipse)” (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 116). It is the pain, physical or psychological—presumably, both, regardless of what side of it might constitute cause or consequence in any given case—that separates the two parts of the “self.” The result is a double gap—one within the subject and one between the subject and the social sphere—to be bridged only when (or if) a cure is discovered, to enable reintegration of the two parts into a whole and enable, upon disruption, the notion of identity’s “permanence in time” to be reconfigured, and the “reidentification of the same” (Ricoeur, 1992) to take place once more. That search is, in itself, potentially traumatic, seeing that it adds more pain to pain, furthermore affecting the targeted to-be-altered “sameness” far more deeply if that pain is great, and if the search for a cure is a lengthy one.

Ismet’s pain is not originally physical, yet it does indeed become not only mental but also physical as his sensitivity to sounds and real or imagined images, brought about by his PTSD, heightens. His loss of language in “. . . a full minute of everything, for cyrus . . .” is a clear manifestation of the

intensity of the pain that he feels. His incoherent utterances, or rather the moaning, the panting, and the squealing, do not come from his “ipse,” but from his deeper, less controlled “idem.” Transferring these notions into perhaps more operational terms, these utterances can be said *not* to come from his overshadowed, unreachable, and therefore silenced “extended consciousness” that would, under normal conditions, constitute his “autobiographical self” and be in control of the “endowment of memory, reasoning ability, and that critical gift called language” (Damasio, 1999, p. 198), but from a deeper level of “core consciousness” where his “proto-self” resides. Proto-self is, notably, responsible only for “the first-order representation” of body states (Damasio, 1999, p. 159), and these can be understood in terms of “neural patterns which map, moment by moment, the state of the physical structure of the organism in its many dimensions” (Damasio, 1999, p. 154).

In applying Ricoeur’s philosophical insight as well as Damasio’s neurocognitive one to the notion of the narrative voice, we should also bear in mind that the proto-self is “not an interpreter of anything” but rather “a reference point at each point in which it is” (Damasio, 1999, p. 154). Hence, a literary account of the process can only point to the relationship between Ismet’s living and hurting organism and the second-order neural maps that make him react to stimuli that he finds disturbing. The narrative thus captures and, in a sense, transcribes a “second-order nonverbal account” that can be said to “narrate” a story “of the organism caught in the act of representing its changing state as it goes about representing something else.” It is, indeed, an “astonishing fact . . . that the knowable entity of the catcher has just been created in the narrative of the catching process” (Damasio, 1999, p. 170), which is a rather accurate description of the level and mode of the unconscious voicing of the character by the vehicle of his trauma.

In identifying the neural self, that is, the proto-self, as the deep, unconscious source of the narrative voice that captures the traumatic state of a living human organism, we are hence inclined to accordingly term this type of narrative, the source of which can be identified within Ismet’s proto-self, as “proto-narrative.” To put it more figuratively, we could also call it “mirror narrative” seeing that it offers itself as a medium able to reflect the multifaceted nature of trauma that acts as the internal agent to the narrative voice. It is that very mirroring effect that made its way through the memoir to drill the channel for the expressions of pain that accompany all traumatic experience while also pointing to the ambivalence of so-called “ficto-factuality” that is said to reflect the ontological status of literature itself (Oraić Tolić, 1996, p. 113). Finally, this also constitutes a confirmation of the repetitive, indeed reduplicative if not even multiplicative nature of trauma that caused Ismet not only to be transformed into Mustafa, but also to multiply into Ismet-the-character and the narrative object, Ismet-the-character and the narrative subject, Ismet-the-narrator, Ismet-the-implicit-author,

Ismet-the-author, Ismet-Mustafa, and perhaps a few more of them, enabling them all to jointly defy the severe restrictions of the “grammar of pain” and create conditions for the voice of trauma to be recorded, and heard.

To conclude, the “proto-narrative” can be said to be mimetic in a surprisingly literal sense of the word, seeing that it reflects the workings of trauma within the neural framework of the body. In its being detected by the brain and recorded in writing, it is the malady itself that gets extraordinarily raised to the position of a narrative subject, with the effect of silencing all other narrative activity to make itself heard. It involves the use of literary techniques that establish reality as a platform that enables the author to reach and to show another, hidden reality, which is by no means any less real for the mere fact that it commonly remains beyond the reach of our eyes, ears, and minds. Showing (mimesis) and telling (diegesis) hence appear to clash and to reunite in meaning-productive and eye-opening ways, which in itself constitutes a call for further investigation into the deeply subjective, neural underpinnings of narrative modes that enable the voicing of trauma in literature.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Publication of this paper was supported by a grant from the University North to which the authors of this article are grateful for the big support.

### ORCID iD

Iva Rosanda Žigo  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1149-091X>

### References

- Brnčić, J. (2007). Ricœurova hermeneutika sebstva. *Filozofska Istraživanja*, 28(3), 731–747.
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative and history*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Crossley, M. L. (2000). *Introducing narrative psychology: Self, trauma and the construction of meaning*. Open University Press.
- Damasio, A. (1999). *The feeling of what happens: Body and emotion in the making of consciousness*. Harcourt.
- Elbert, T., & Schauer, M. (2002). Psychological trauma: Burnt into memory. *Nature*, 419, Article 883. <https://doi.org/10.1038/419883a>
- Genette, G. (1980). *Narrative discourse: An essay in method* (1st ed.; Editions due Seuil, 1972, J. E. Lewin, Trans.). Cornell University Press.
- Greene, M. C., Kane, J. C., Krawczyk, N., Brown, F., Murray, L., Khoshnood, K., & Wietse, A. T. (2018). Alcohol and drug misuse interventions in conflict-affected populations. In N. Morina & A. Nickerson (Eds.), *Mental health of refugee and conflict-affected populations: Theory, research and clinical practice* (pp. 221–241). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97046-2\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97046-2_11)
- Hunt, N. C. (2010). *Memory, war and trauma*. Cambridge University Press.
- LaCapra, D. (2014). *Writing history, writing trauma*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Linden, M. (2013). Spectrum of persisting memories and pseudo-memories, distortions, and psychopathology. In M. Linden & K. Rutkowski (Eds.), *Hurting memories and beneficial forgetting: Posttraumatic stress disorders, biographical developments, and social conflicts* (pp. 4–20). <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-398393-0.00001-8>
- Neuner, F., Elbert, T., & Schauer, M. (2018). Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) as a treatment for traumatized refugees and post-conflict populations. In N. Morina & A. Nickerson (Eds.), *Mental health of refugee and conflict-affected populations: Theory, research and clinical practice* (pp. 183–200). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97046-2\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97046-2_9)
- Oraić Tolić, D. (1996). *Paradigme 20. stoljeća. Avangarda i postmoderna* [Paradigms of the 20th Century. The Avant-Garde and Postmodernism.]. Zavod za znanost o književnosti Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu.
- Politis, M., & Loane, C. (2012). Reduplicative paramnesia: A review. *Psychopathology*, 45(6), 337–343. <https://www.karger.com/Article/Pdf/337748>
- Prcić, I. (2011). *Shards*. Grove Atlantic.
- Ricœur, P. (1992). *Oneself as another*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Scarry, E. (1985). *The body in pain*. Oxford University Press.
- Schauer, M., Neuner, F., & Elbert, T. (2011). *Narrative Exposure Therapy: A short term treatment for traumatic stress disorders*. Hogrefe Publishing.
- Smith, T. L. (1913). Paramnesia in daily life. *American Journal of Psychology*, 24(1), 52–65.
- Suleiman, S. R. (2010). The edge of memory: Literary innovation and childhood trauma. In R. Crownshaw, J. Kilby, & A. Rowland (Eds.), *The future of memory* (pp. 93–110). Berghahn Books.
- Vasterling, J. J., & Lippa, S. (2014). Neurocognitive alterations associated with PTSD: Neuropsychological deficits, information-processing biases, and implications for mild traumatic brain injury. In M. J. Friedman, T. M. Keane, & P. A. Resick (Eds.), *Handbook of PTSD: Science and practice* (pp. 185–199). The Guilford Press.