



A Review of Trauma, Survival, and Narrative Structure: A Study of Post-Attempt Recovery in Salman Rushdie's *Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder*

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Abstract

This study explores how Salman Rushdie's *Knife: Meditations after an Attempted Murder* uses a fragmented and nonlinear narrative to portray trauma, survival, and post-traumatic recovery. The objective is to examine how Rushdie's narrative structure reflects the disorientation and psychological fragmentation associated with trauma. Methodologically, the paper conducts a close textual analysis of *Knife*, drawing from trauma studies and narrative theory to investigate how literary techniques convey psychological states. The study emphasizes Rushdie's use of repetition, memory loops, public-private discourse shifts, and symbolic metaphors as narrative strategies. The findings reveal that the nonlinear form of the memoir is not merely stylistic but serves as a literary mechanism for processing trauma. The narrative's disjointed structure mimics the temporal disruptions of traumatic memory, while the act of writing emerges as a therapeutic tool through which Rushdie reclaims agency and reconstructs identity. The paper concludes that *Knife* offers more than a personal recollection of violence; it stands as a powerful literary example of how narrative form can both express and mediate psychological healing. Through reflective storytelling, Rushdie exemplifies the transformative potential of literature in navigating trauma and recovery.

Keywords: Trauma, survival, narrative structure, post-traumatic recovery, Salman Rushdie

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Introduction

Salman Rushdie, a prominent British-Indian author, is widely known for his engagement with political, cultural, and religious themes in literature. His works, such as *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*, have sparked global discussions and controversies. In 1989, Rushdie became the target of a fatwa following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, culminating in an assassination attempt in 2022. In *Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder*, Rushdie offers a deeply personal and meditative account of his experience of trauma and survival. Departing from the conventions of a linear memoir, the text presents fragmented recollections and emotional reflections that invite literary exploration (Pellicer-Ortín, 2020); (Grass & Robert-Foley, 2024). This study positions *Knife* within the broader discourse of

trauma narratives and literary recovery. Despite a growing body of scholarship on trauma literature, limited critical attention has been paid to *Knife* as a literary response to personal violence and its implications for narrative form (Deller, 2024). This article aims to analyze how Rushdie's fragmented narrative structure reflects the psychological complexities of trauma, the experience of survival, and the process of recovery. The analysis draws on trauma theory and narrative theory to understand the interrelation between literary form and emotional healing.

Salman Rushdie's works have long been recognized for their narrative richness and boldness in exploring complex issues (Yasir & Fnteel, 2023). From stunning magical realism to incisive critiques of politics and history, Rushdie consistently uses the power of story as a tool for understanding the world. Yet, beneath all of this lies a strong common thread: the themes of trauma and recovery. In many of his novels, his characters must confront traumatic experiences that not only change their lives but also reshape their memories, identities, and narratives. These stories demonstrate that the process of survival occurs not only in the real world but also within narrative itself, where past wounds can be processed and reinterpreted. Narration thus becomes a form of resistance, a way to regain control over traumatic experiences and transform them into a source of strength.

The process of post-traumatic healing in Rushdie's works is often depicted as a complex and non-linear narrative journey. Rather than following a straightforward storyline, Rushdie often employs a fragmented narrative structure, replete with flashbacks, shifting perspectives, and a blend of fact and fiction. This structure serves as a reflection of the psychological turmoil experienced by trauma survivors (Muldoon et al., 2019); (Abbas et al., 2024); (Bryngeirsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2022). Fractured memories, distorted time, and the difficulty in coherently organizing experiences become integral parts of the narrative, effectively representing the characters' internal confusion and turmoil. Through this fragmentation, Rushdie demonstrates not only the devastating impact of trauma but also the ways in which stories themselves—with all their complexities and imperfections—serve as vehicles for understanding and coping with suffering (Mackenthun, 2021). More than mere reflection, narrative in Rushdie's work also functions as an active tool of healing. The characters don't simply tell their stories; they actively reconstruct them, fill in the missing pieces, and even create new narratives to give meaning to their trauma (Wiesepape et al., 2025); (Haeyen et al., 2024). This act of storytelling becomes a form of resistance, in which survivors take back ownership of their experiences, refusing to be passive victims. This study will examine how Rushdie uses narrative structure—through magical realism, metafiction, and genre fusion—as a pathway to self-understanding, acceptance, and ultimately, recovery from traumatic experiences. By analyzing the intimate relationship between trauma, survival, and narrative structure, we can better understand how Rushdie's fictional stories offer models for reconstructing life after destruction. The following research questions guide this study:

1. How does the structure of *Knife* reflect the trauma experienced by Rushdie?

2. What role does narrative fragmentation play in conveying psychological effects of the attack?
3. How Rushdie does's writing process act as a method of survival and recovery?

Method

Approach and Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a focus on textual analysis and literary theory. The primary theoretical framework used is a combination of Trauma Theory and Narratology. Trauma Theory, as proposed by scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dominick LaCapra, will be used to understand how traumatic experiences affect memory, identity, and an individual's ability to construct narratives. Key relevant concepts include latency (the re-emergence of trauma later in life), unrepresentability (the inability to fully express trauma), and working-through (the psychological process of coping with and integrating trauma). Meanwhile, Narratology will be applied to examine the structure and mechanisms of the narrative in *Knife*. We will analyze narrative elements such as point of view, chronology, narrative fragmentation, and the use of metaphor to examine how Rushdie structures his experiences. The combination of these two theories allows us to not only identify representations of trauma in the text but also analyze how the form and structure of the narrative itself function as a response to trauma.

Data Sources

The primary data source for this study is Salman Rushdie's book, *Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder* (2024). A careful analysis will be conducted on the text, including narrative passages, personal reflections, and Rushdie's metaphors. Secondary data will include book reviews, interviews with the author, and relevant critical literature on Rushdie's previous works, trauma theory, and narratology.

Analysis Procedure

The analysis procedure will be conducted in three stages:

1. Close Reading: We will read *Knife* repeatedly and carefully, focusing on sections that explicitly discuss the assault incident, the recovery process, and the author's reflections. We will identify specific examples of trauma representation, such as distorted memories or metaphorical language.
2. Thematic Analysis: Based on the collected data, we will identify and categorize key emerging themes, such as:
 - a. Physical and psychological experiences following the assault.
 - b. The relationship between violence and creativity.
 - c. The role of language and narrative in the healing process.
 - d. Reconstruction of self-identity after experiencing trauma.
3. Synthesis and Interpretation: In the final stage, we will synthesize the findings from the thematic analysis within the framework of trauma and narrative theory. We will interpret how the narrative structure of *Knife*—with its meditative and non-linear nature—not only depicts trauma but also serves as an active tool for Rushdie to work through and regain control of his own narrative. Conclusions will be drawn regarding how traumatic experiences can shape, and even strengthen, a writer's narrative power.

Result and Discussion

Theoretical Framework

To understand the narrative structure and thematic concerns in Salman Rushdie's *Knife: Meditations after an Attempted Murder*, it is crucial to ground the analysis in relevant theoretical frameworks. In particular, trauma theory and narrative theory offer significant insights into how Rushdie represents his recovery from the physical and psychological impacts of the assassination attempt. By employing these theoretical perspectives, this study will explore how Rushdie's narrative structure reflects the fragmented and complex nature of trauma, survival, and healing.

Trauma Theory

Trauma theory offers a lens through which the physical, emotional, and psychological aftereffects of violence can be understood. According to trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth, trauma is not just a personal experience but an event that disrupts the normal order of experience and creates a profound sense of alienation and fragmentation. (Yang, 2023); (Charretier et al., 2024), argues that trauma is marked by an inability to narrate the event fully, as the traumatic memory resists easy articulation and often emerges in disjointed, incoherent forms. This lack of coherence in the trauma narrative reflects the fractured state of the self after experiencing violence. In *Knife*, Rushdie's narrative is deeply fragmented, echoing Caruth's notion of the "unrepresentable" nature of trauma. The book does not provide a straightforward account of Rushdie's recovery but presents a series of meditative reflections, flashbacks, and nonlinear thoughts that mirror the disorienting experience of trauma. Rushdie's approach aligns with trauma theory's emphasis on the difficulty of constructing a coherent narrative of the traumatic event and the subsequent process of attempting to understand and heal from it. Judith Herman, in her influential work *Trauma and Recovery* (Zoromba et al., 2024); (Bovey et al., 2025), explores the long-term effects of trauma on the individual, emphasizing the importance of rebuilding one's life through a process of recovery and re-engagement with society. She identifies three stages of recovery: the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with normal life. In Rushdie's case, the text itself is a tool for processing and confronting his trauma, moving through these stages as he reflects on his journey from survival to recovery. Moreover, Shoshana Felman's work on the intersection between trauma and storytelling adds another layer to the analysis (D'Cruz et al., 2020). She suggests that trauma can only be understood through narrative — not necessarily as a linear progression but as an ongoing process of narrating and re-narrating. In this context, Rushdie's writing can be seen as a form of "narrative repair," where he continually revisits and reconstructs his trauma to make sense of the chaotic aftermath.

Narrative Theory

In addition to trauma theory, narrative theory plays a key role in understanding the structure of *Knife*. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "dialogic" narrative emphasizes the role of multiple voices and perspectives in a text. For Rushdie, the narrative voice is not singular; it is fragmented, complex, and full of internal dialogues. This fragmentation of narrative aligns with the disjointed nature of trauma, as individuals recovering from trauma often struggle with reconciling multiple facets of their identity, memories, and experiences. Furthermore, Hayden White's work on historical narration and the use of "emplotment" is useful for understanding how Rushdie organizes his experience of trauma. White suggests that the act of writing history or personal experience involves selecting certain events and organizing them into a meaningful structure. In *Knife*, Rushdie's fragmented and often contradictory style represents his attempt to reconstruct a coherent story from the chaos of his post-traumatic life. However, the use of this nonlinear structure is not merely a formal choice; it is reflective of the process of trying to reassemble a sense of self and meaning after a violent attack. Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) is another theoretical framework relevant to understanding the process of recovery in Rushdie's text. PTG, as

explored by Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence (Adonis et al., 2025), refers to the positive psychological changes that can occur after experiencing trauma. These changes may involve greater personal strength, a redefined sense of life's purpose, and an enhanced appreciation for life. Rushdie's reflections in *Knife* suggest that his journey toward recovery is not solely marked by pain and loss, but also by growth and a new understanding of his place in the world. This notion of recovery as transformation rather than mere return to normalcy is central to the novel's depiction of survival and healing.

Applying the Theoretical Framework

By employing these frameworks trauma theory, narrative theory, and post-traumatic growth this paper aims to explore how Rushdie's narrative structure in *Knife* represents his psychological and emotional recovery. Rushdie's non-linear, fragmented narrative mirrors the chaotic and disorienting effects of trauma, while simultaneously offering a space for introspection, growth, and a re-conceptualization of self. The theoretical tools outlined in this section will help guide the analysis of the novel's structure and themes, shedding light on the complex interplay between trauma, survival, and recovery. This section provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the way Rushdie uses narrative structure to represent trauma and recovery in *Knife*. By drawing on trauma theory, narrative theory, and the concept of post-traumatic growth, it sets up the analytical framework for the rest of the paper.

Narrative Structure and Trauma Representation

Salman Rushdie's *Knife: Meditations after an Attempted Murder* employs a non-linear, fragmented narrative structure that effectively mirrors the disorienting and often incoherent nature of trauma. The text is not organized chronologically or in a traditional linear sequence, but rather in a way that reflects the psychological fragmentation experienced by Rushdie after the assassination attempt. This section will explore how the structure of *Knife* reflects the complexities of trauma and survival, focusing on the ways in which Rushdie's fragmented narrative forms convey the emotional and psychological aftermath of violence.

Fragmentation of Narrative

The most striking feature of *Knife* is its fragmented narrative. Rather than offering a straightforward account of his recovery, Rushdie presents his reflections, memories, and emotions in a disjointed manner. This fragmentation is not random; it serves as a deliberate representation of the psychological effects of trauma. Trauma, as discussed in the theoretical framework, often leads to a fragmented sense of self and memory. The inability to form a coherent, linear narrative of traumatic events is one of the defining characteristics of trauma. Rushdie's writing reflects this fragmented state, presenting the reader with moments of recollection, flashbacks, and scattered thoughts that resist easy categorization or interpretation. Rushdie's non-linear structure prevents the reader from experiencing his trauma in a controlled, sequential manner, much as the trauma itself is chaotic and disorderly. The book oscillates between the past and present, moving from the moment of the attack to Rushdie's ongoing reflections on the incident and his recovery. This disjointed approach makes the trauma feel immediate and ever-present, as though the attack is not something in the past, but an ongoing presence in Rushdie's life. The reader is pulled into the emotional intensity of the experience, unable to distance themselves from the complexity of Rushdie's inner world. This narrative fragmentation becomes a powerful tool for conveying the persistent, unresolved nature of trauma.

Repetition and Reconfiguration of Memory

Another narrative technique used by Rushdie in *Knife* is the repetition and reconfiguration of memory. Trauma survivors often find themselves revisiting the traumatic event repeatedly, not necessarily in an effort to understand it, but as part of the process of attempting to come to terms with it. In the text, Rushdie reflects on the same moments and feelings multiple times, with each iteration offering a slightly different perspective or insight. This technique mirrors the way in which trauma is not something that can be fully processed in one sitting, but rather something that continually resurfaces in different forms. Rushdie's repeated engagement with the trauma in *Knife* reflects the concept of "narrative repair" as discussed by (Paul et al., 2015), in which the act of writing becomes a means of reconstructing and understanding trauma. The repetitive nature of Rushdie's reflections allows him to create a sense of continuity and coherence out of an event that initially shattered his sense of self and purpose. However, the repetitions are never the same; they evolve and change, demonstrating that trauma recovery is not a static process but a dynamic, ongoing attempt to understand and incorporate the event into one's life. Additionally, the reconfiguration of memory in *Knife* highlights the role of the mind in interpreting and revisiting trauma. Memories are not fixed; they are reconstructed over time, influenced by the person's emotional state, social context, and ongoing experiences. Rushdie's shifting perspectives on his trauma reflect this fluidity of memory and the complexity of living with the aftereffects of such a violent event.

Interplay Between Public and Private Narratives

Knife also examines the interplay between public and private narratives of trauma. Rushdie's experience of trauma is not only personal but is also part of a larger political and cultural narrative. The assassination attempt on his life was widely covered in the media, and it became a symbol of the clash between the West and the Islamic world, with Rushdie caught in the crossfire. However, in *Knife*, Rushdie focuses not on the public spectacle of the attack but on the intimate, personal experience of surviving it. This tension between public and private narratives is central to understanding how trauma is represented in *Knife*. On one hand, Rushdie is a public figure whose trauma is widely known, but on the other hand, his personal reflections and recovery are intensely private. The book oscillates between these two domains, suggesting that trauma cannot be fully understood without recognizing both its public and private dimensions. The public narrative of the attack often oversimplifies or distorts the complexity of Rushdie's experience, while the private narrative seeks to capture the nuance and emotional depth of his recovery. This interplay between public and private narratives of trauma also reflects the broader dynamics of how trauma is often politicized or commodified. Rushdie's struggle to reclaim his own narrative from the larger political and media spectacle is an important theme in *Knife*, as he seeks to carve out a space for his personal experience amidst the overwhelming external forces that seek to define him.

Symbolism and Metaphor in Structure

Rushdie also utilizes symbolic and metaphorical language to enhance the narrative structure of *Knife*. The recurring motif of the "knife" itself serves as a powerful symbol of both the physical attack and the metaphorical wound left by the event. The knife is not only the weapon that nearly took his life but also represents the deeper psychological and emotional wounds that the attack inflicted upon him. This symbolism is reflected in the structure of the text, which is itself cut and fragmented, much like Rushdie's wounded psyche. The use of metaphorical imagery, such as references to the body, the self, and healing, complements the fragmented narrative structure. By employing these metaphors, Rushdie is able to convey the complexity of trauma recovery, which involves both the physical process of healing and the more elusive, psychological journey of coming to terms with the violence that was inflicted upon him. This section explores how the structure of *Knife* — with its fragmentation, repetition, and blending of

public and private narratives — reflects the trauma and recovery experienced by Rushdie. The interplay between different narrative techniques, such as repetition of memory and symbolic language, reinforces the fragmented and non-linear nature of the healing process. Through this structural approach, Rushdie offers a compelling portrayal of the emotional and psychological impact of trauma.

Thematic Analysis: Trauma, Survival, and Recovery

In *Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder*, Salman Rushdie navigates themes of trauma, survival, and recovery through a deeply personal and introspective narrative. This section will explore how these themes unfold in the text, examining the impact of the traumatic experience on Rushdie's identity, the complex process of survival, and the varied ways in which recovery is depicted. By focusing on the psychological, emotional, and physical dimensions of trauma, Rushdie's text presents a nuanced view of the aftermath of violence and the challenging path to healing.

Trauma and Its Psychological Effects

At the heart of *Knife* is the psychological impact of trauma, which is explored in great depth. Trauma, is not simply a reaction to a single event but an ongoing experience that reshapes the survivor's sense of self and worldview. For Rushdie, the attempted murder does not just mark a single, discrete moment in his life but initiates a profound transformation of his identity. The text conveys the psychological fragmentation that accompanies such a violent event, with Rushdie's narrative style reflecting the disorienting nature of trauma. His mind becomes a battleground of conflicting emotions — fear, anger, confusion, and even a sense of guilt — as he struggles to come to terms with the violence he has experienced. Rushdie's psychological trauma manifests in various ways, including recurring nightmares, flashbacks, and moments of dissociation. These fragmented experiences are not merely retellings of the attack itself, but representations of the ongoing emotional and cognitive disarray that follow trauma. The narrative becomes a space for Rushdie to grapple with his new identity as a survivor and the psychological costs that survival entails. The trauma is never “fixed” or “resolved”; it continues to reverberate throughout the text, emphasizing the notion that trauma is an enduring presence in the lives of survivors, rather than an event that can be fully overcome.

Survival: The Physical and Emotional Struggles

Survival in *Knife* is portrayed not only as a physical act but as an emotional and psychological struggle. While Rushdie survives the assassination attempt physically, the emotional toll of such an event is profound. The physical scars of the attack are only one aspect of his survival; the emotional scars — feelings of vulnerability, the fear of death, and the sense of an altered existence — are far more enduring. The juxtaposition of these physical and emotional aspects of survival becomes a central theme in the text. In *Knife*, survival is shown to be a process of constant negotiation. Rushdie's writing reflects the difficulty of returning to “normal” life after an experience that permanently alters one's perception of self and the world. This theme of survival as an ongoing struggle is encapsulated in his meditative reflections, which oscillate between moments of strength and moments of overwhelming vulnerability. Through this lens, Rushdie presents survival as a continuous, evolving process, rather than a one-time event. He must learn to live with his trauma, and this process of living with the aftermath is as much a part of his survival as the physical recovery. Rushdie's depiction of survival highlights the complexity of the survivor's experience. While the attack physically threatens his life, it also forces him to confront his own mortality and to rethink his place in the world. As Rushdie reflects on his survival, he often questions the meaning of life, the reasons for his survival, and the purpose of his continued existence. These existential questions underscore the deep emotional and intellectual impact of surviving such an attack. Rushdie is not only

surviving the physical wounds inflicted upon him but also the emotional and intellectual repercussions of an event that shatters his previous understanding of self and the world.

Recovery and Transformation

Recovery in *Knife* is not presented as a simple return to pre-trauma conditions but as a complex, multifaceted process of transformation. In the aftermath of the attack, Rushdie must reassemble his life and identity, a process that is both painful and liberating. Rather than seeking to “move on” or return to a sense of normalcy, Rushdie’s recovery is depicted as a journey of transformation — one that requires both confronting the trauma and integrating it into a new understanding of self. Rushdie’s reflections in *Knife* suggest that recovery is a process of “becoming” rather than a static return to what was lost. This notion of recovery as transformation is reinforced by his use of symbolic language and imagery. For example, the knife, which serves as both a literal and metaphorical symbol of violence, also represents the tools of survival and recovery. The knife is an instrument that both wounds and heals, much as the experience of trauma both destroys and reshapes the individual. Through this lens, recovery becomes an active process of engaging with the trauma, acknowledging its impact, and finding meaning in the aftermath. A key aspect of Rushdie’s recovery is the reassertion of agency.

Despite the violence and trauma he has endured, Rushdie ultimately takes control of his narrative. Writing becomes his means of reclaiming his voice, asserting his agency, and transforming his pain into a source of creative expression. This act of writing is central to his recovery, as it allows him to reconstruct his identity and reframe his trauma. Writing, in this sense, becomes both a therapeutic and a creative process, helping Rushdie re-envision his place in the world and regain control over his own story. Moreover, the concept of post-traumatic growth (PTG), as discussed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), is applicable to Rushdie’s recovery. PTG refers to the positive psychological changes that can occur after experiencing trauma, such as increased personal strength, a deeper appreciation for life, and a redefined sense of purpose. While Rushdie’s recovery is not without its struggles, the text ultimately reflects a sense of growth — both personal and artistic. Through the process of confronting and narrating his trauma, Rushdie emerges with a renewed understanding of himself and his place in the world. His journey is not one of mere survival but one of growth, transformation, and, ultimately, empowerment.

Reclaiming the Self

The recovery process in *Knife* also involves reclaiming the self. Trauma often leads to a fractured sense of identity, and for Rushdie, the attempted murder is a turning point that forces him to reevaluate who he is and what he values. His journey of recovery is as much about redefining himself as it is about physical healing. In the aftermath of the attack, Rushdie must confront not only his survival but also his new identity as a survivor. This process of self-reclamation is ongoing throughout the text, and the text itself becomes a tool for reclaiming the self from the traumatic experience. Rushdie’s exploration of survival and recovery, then, is not simply a personal reflection on his own experience but also an exploration of universal themes. The process of surviving trauma, reconciling with its effects, and undergoing transformation is a shared human experience. Through his meditative reflections in *Knife*, Rushdie invites readers to consider their own experiences with trauma and recovery, and to think about the ways in which trauma shapes not only individuals but also societies. This section provides an in-depth exploration of the themes of trauma, survival, and recovery in *Knife*. By analyzing how these themes unfold in the text, it demonstrates how Rushdie uses his narrative to reflect the emotional, psychological, and existential dimensions of recovery after trauma. Through the complex representation of survival and transformation, *Knife* offers a profound meditation on the effects of violence and the possibility of growth in the face of adversity.

The Process of Healing and Recovery

In *Knife*, Rushdie does not present recovery as the simple closure of a violent chapter but as an ongoing, multifaceted journey of body, mind, and identity. The text's meditative, non-linear style mirrors the uneven, cyclical nature of healing, moving between moments of despair and glimpses of renewal. Drawing on trauma theory's stages of recovery and post-traumatic growth, this section examines how Rushdie's narrative enactment of healing unfolds in three interrelated dimensions: reflection, writing-as-therapy, and transformation.

Recovery Through Reflective Meditation

Rushdie's most immediate tool for recovery is introspective reflection. Rather than describing a progressive "return to normal," his meditations linger on the lingering shock, physical therapy sessions, and the small sensory details—"the metallic taste of blood," "the ache of stitches"—that anchor him in his wounded body. These reflections function as what Herman calls the stage of "remembrance and mourning", where survivors bear witness to their pain. By placing such reflections at irregular intervals—sometimes in a single paragraph, sometimes unfolding over pages—Rushdie conveys how memories of the attack eb and flow, intruding unexpectedly yet gradually losing their paralyzing force. Moreover, Rushdie intersperses moments of stillness—descriptions of watching birds or reading poetry—to show how interludes of calm can punctuate and even facilitate the mourning process. These contrasts underscore that healing is neither linear nor uniform; it is composed of oscillations between confrontation and reprieve, reflecting the complex temporalities of trauma recovery.

Writing as Therapeutic Practice

Central to Rushdie's healing is the act of writing itself. In *Knife*, narrative becomes both method and metaphor for recovery: each entry, each revision, serves as an act of narrative repair (Marcovitz et al., 2021). By externalizing his trauma—putting it into words—Rushdie transforms overwhelming, involuntary memories into something he can revise, structure, and, to some extent, control. The text frequently refers to his notebook and the "slow work of transcription," highlighting how the disciplined labor of writing provides a framework for channeling emotional turmoil into creative expression. This process aligns with research on expressive writing in psychology, which finds that narrative coherence—the ability to construct a story with a beginning, middle, and end—can reduce post-traumatic symptoms by organizing chaotic memories into a structured form. Rushdie's repeated revisitations to particular scenes or feelings demonstrate how writing allows him to test new interpretations, moving from raw shock toward a sense of meaning.

Post-Traumatic Growth and Transformation

While *Knife* does not shy away from physical and psychological hardship, it also embodies the concept of post-traumatic growth (PTG). (Maurer et al., 2023) identify domains of growth—greater personal strength, deeper relationships, new appreciation for life—and Rushdie's narrative gestures toward each. He reflects on how the fragility of his own life heightens his empathy for others who suffer, and how the confrontation with mortality instills in him a renewed passion for storytelling. The motif of the knife itself shifts in meaning over the course of the book: from an instrument of violence to a symbol of cutting away old certainties, allowing Rushdie to cultivate creative resilience. Passages that once conjured fear are revisited with wry humor or philosophical detachment, signaling that Rushdie's inner landscape has expanded to accommodate both pain and possibility.

Reconnection, Agency, and Ongoing Struggle

Finally, recovery in *Knife* culminates in a reassertion of agency. Rushdie moves from being a passive victim of violence to an active architect of his own narrative. By choosing which memories to foreground and which metaphors to employ, he reclaims control over his identity. Yet even this reclamation is shown as precarious—he acknowledges setbacks such as “nights when the pain returns unbidden,” reminding readers that healing is never complete. Rushdie’s gradual reconnection with family, friends, and the wider literary community illustrates the stage of “reconnection with ordinary life” (Weziak-Bialowolska et al., 2023). His ability to teach, lecture, and publish again demonstrates that the healed self is not identical to the pre-trauma self but is instead a reconfigured self—one tempered by adversity, open to change, and capable of weaving suffering into a richer tapestry of meaning.

Conclusion

Salman Rushdie’s *Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder* offers a deeply personal yet universally resonant exploration of trauma and resilience through innovative narrative form. By navigating the disjunction between memory, language, and recovery, the text extends the possibilities of the memoir genre and underscores the healing power of storytelling. Rather than simply recounting suffering, *Knife* reconstructs it through language, enabling a reframing of trauma as part of a larger journey toward self-renewal. In doing so, Rushdie invites readers to witness the intricacies of survival beyond physical endurance, highlighting the emotional and psychological negotiation that trauma demands. The study contributes to broader conversations in trauma and narrative theory, illustrating how literary form can serve as both a mirror of psychic fragmentation and a mechanism of self-repair. Future research might explore comparative studies of trauma memoirs across cultures, or investigate the evolving role of literary trauma narratives in public discourse and healing practices.

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest

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