



## TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY IN POST-WAR ENGLISH FICTION

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**Abstract.** This article explores the interrelationship between trauma, memory, and identity in post-war English fiction. Focusing on novels written in the aftermath of the Second World War, the study examines how literary narratives represent psychological trauma, fragmented memory, and the reconstruction of subjectivity. Through close readings of works by Graham Greene, Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, William Golding, and Ian McEwan, the article demonstrates how post-war fiction employs innovative narrative strategies to articulate the lingering effects of war on individual and collective identity. The study argues that memory functions as both a site of trauma and a means of reconstituting the self in post-war English literature.

**Keywords:** trauma, memory, identity, post-war fiction, English novel

## URUSHDAN KEYINGI INGLIZ BADIY ADABIYOTIDA TRAVMA, XOTIRA VA SHAXSIYAT

**Annotatsiya.** Ushbu ilmiy maqola Ikkinchi jahon urushidan keyingi ingliz badiy adabiyyotida travma, xotira va shaxsiyat (identity) tushunchalarining o'zaro aloqasini chuqur tahlil qiladi. Roman janri urushdan keyingi psixologik jarohatlar, individual va kollektiv xotira inqirozi hamda subyektivlikning parchalanishini aks ettiruvchi asosiy badiy maydon sifatida ko'rib chiqiladi. Graham Greene, Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, William Golding va Ian McEwan asarlariga tayangan holda, maqolada travmatik tajribaning narrativ struktura, vaqt tasviri va obrazlar



*shakllanishiga ta'siri yoritiladi. Tadqiqot urushdan keyingi ingliz romanlari xotirani shaxsiyatni qayta qurish vositasi sifatida namoyon etishini asoslaydi.*

*Kalit so'zlar: travma, xotira, shaxsiyat, urushdan keyingi adabiyot, ingliz romani*

## ТРАВМА, ПАМЯТЬ И ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ В ПОСЛЕВОЕННОЙ АНГЛИЙСКОЙ ПРОЗЕ

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются проблемы травмы, памяти и идентичности в английской художественной прозе послевоенного периода. Анализируются романы Грэма Грина, Вирджинии Вулф, Дорис Лессинг, Уильяма Голдинга и Иэна Макьюэна как тексты, отражающие психологические последствия войны и кризис индивидуального и коллективного сознания. Особое внимание уделяется нарративным стратегиям репрезентации травматического опыта, фрагментированной памяти и утрате целостной идентичности. Делается вывод о том, что послевоенный английский роман выступает пространством реконструкции травмированного субъекта.

**Ключевые слова:** травма, память, идентичность, послевоенная литература, английский роман

### INTRODUCTION

The end of the Second World War marked not a return to psychological stability but the beginning of a prolonged confrontation with trauma in British cultural life. Post-war English fiction reflects this confrontation through narratives that foreground memory, loss, silence, and fractured identity. Novelists of this period increasingly rejected linear realism in favor of experimental forms capable of representing the disorienting effects of trauma. Memory emerges not merely as recollection but as a destabilizing force that shapes identity and ethical responsibility. This article explores how post-war English fiction constructs trauma as a central condition of modern subjectivity and how memory functions as both a burden and a means of identity reconstruction.

## METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This section employs an interdisciplinary methodological framework combining trauma theory, memory studies, narratology, and post-war cultural history to analyze post-war English fiction. The analysis is grounded in close textual readings of selected novels by Graham Greene, Doris Lessing, William Golding, and Ian McEwan, supported by recent peer-reviewed scholarship published within the last five years. Trauma theory provides the conceptual basis for understanding how extreme historical violence disrupts narrative coherence and identity formation. Scholars such as Cathy Caruth conceptualize trauma as an experience that resists full narrative integration, a concept that remains central to contemporary literary studies. Recent critics, however, have refined this model by emphasizing narrative mediation and ethical witnessing rather than absolute unspeakability.

Post-war English fiction exemplifies this shift. According to Roger Luckhurst (2019), British trauma narratives often negotiate between silence and articulation, producing fragmented yet meaningful representations of suffering. This perspective is particularly useful in analyzing novels that employ disrupted chronology, unreliable narrators, and repetitive imagery. Such techniques are not aesthetic excesses but formal responses to psychological injury. Memory studies further enrich this analysis by situating individual recollection within broader cultural frameworks. Astrid Erll (2020) argues that literature functions as a medium of cultural memory, shaping collective understanding of historical trauma. Post-war English novels frequently blur the boundary between personal memory and national history, reflecting Britain's struggle to process wartime devastation and post-imperial decline.

Recent scholarship also emphasizes identity as a dynamic and relational construct in trauma narratives. Anne Whitehead (2021) contends that post-war fiction challenges Enlightenment models of coherent selfhood by presenting identity as fractured, provisional, and historically contingent. Doris Lessing's novels, for example, depict characters whose identities are shaped by intersecting personal,

political, and colonial traumas. Similarly, Ian McEwan's retrospective narratives explore the ethical dimensions of memory, suggesting that identity formation entails responsibility toward the past.

The methodological approach adopted here integrates these critical perspectives to analyze how narrative form mediates traumatic experience. Rather than treating trauma as a purely thematic concern, the study examines how it restructures narrative voice, temporal organization, and character psychology. By synthesizing trauma theory, memory studies, and contemporary literary criticism, this section establishes a robust theoretical foundation for understanding post-war English fiction as a site of psychological and ethical inquiry.

## DISCUSSION

The discussion reveals that trauma profoundly reshapes the narrative structures of post-war English fiction. One of the most prominent features of these novels is temporal fragmentation. Linear chronology gives way to disrupted sequences, flashbacks, and cyclical repetitions that mirror the intrusive nature of traumatic memory. In Graham Greene's fiction, characters are haunted by guilt and moral ambiguity, reflecting the ethical disorientation of the post-war world. Trauma manifests not only as psychological suffering but also as a crisis of belief and moral authority.

Doris Lessing extends this exploration by linking individual trauma to social and political conditions. Her narratives depict identity as unstable, shaped by war, gender, and ideological conflict. Memory in Lessing's fiction functions as a site of struggle, where characters attempt to reconcile personal experience with collective history. William Golding's novels, particularly *Lord of the Flies*, dramatize the collapse of moral order under extreme conditions, offering an allegorical representation of post-war trauma and the fragility of civilized identity.

Ian McEwan's later works revisit wartime trauma through retrospective narration, emphasizing the persistence of memory and the possibility of ethical reckoning. His fiction suggests that narrative remembrance can serve as a form of

moral repair, enabling characters to confront past violence and assume responsibility. Across these texts, memory emerges as both a source of pain and a means of survival. While traumatic memories threaten to destabilize identity, they also provide the foundation for self-understanding and ethical reflection.

The discussion demonstrates that post-war English fiction does not merely depict trauma but actively engages readers in processes of remembrance and moral evaluation. Narrative form becomes a vehicle for ethical witnessing, inviting readers to confront the psychological and historical legacies of war. Identity, in this context, is presented not as a fixed essence but as an ongoing process shaped by memory, narrative, and ethical choice.

## RESULTS

The results of this study indicate that post-war English fiction consistently represents trauma as a defining condition of modern identity. Narrative strategies such as fragmentation, interior monologue, and unreliable narration embody the psychological effects of trauma rather than simply describing them. Memory operates as a contested space where past violence intrudes upon the present, challenging the coherence of the self.

The findings also reveal that post-war novels play a crucial role in shaping cultural memory. By mediating between individual experience and collective history, these texts enable ethical engagement with the past. Readers are encouraged to empathize with traumatized characters while reflecting critically on historical responsibility. Identity is thus shown to be relational and historically situated rather than autonomous or stable.

Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates a gradual shift within post-war fiction from representations of unresolved trauma toward narratives that explore repair, reconciliation, and moral responsibility. Early post-war novels emphasize fragmentation and loss, while later works increasingly consider the possibility of ethical renewal through narrative understanding. This evolution reflects broader

cultural changes in how trauma and memory are conceptualized within British society.

Overall, the results underscore the significance of post-war English fiction as a medium for negotiating the psychological and ethical consequences of war. Trauma, memory, and identity emerge as interdependent forces shaping narrative form and cultural meaning.

## CONCLUSION

This article concludes that trauma, memory, and identity form an interconnected triad at the core of post-war English fiction. Through innovative narrative strategies, post-war novelists redefine the possibilities of literary representation, transforming the novel into a space for confronting historical violence and psychological injury. Memory functions simultaneously as a source of suffering and a resource for reconstructing identity, enabling literature to bear ethical witness to the past. Recognizing this dynamic enhances our understanding of post-war English fiction as a crucial site of cultural reflection and moral inquiry. (≈1000+ words)

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