Central Queensland University

Leanne Dodd

Plot interrupted: reproducing the narrative benefits of trauma fiction in crime fiction

Abstract:

Trauma distorts time and interrupts the natural flow of people's life-stories. While bibliotherapists may prescribe fictional stories to help clients internalise better coping mechanisms and re-author their life stories, they rarely select crime fiction for this purpose. This article demonstrates how crime writers can create works that may fit the criteria for transformative therapy. Whitehead suggests that trauma fiction writers have 'frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms' (2004: 3). By aligning the narrative strategies used in trauma fiction to distort time, such as fragmentation and repetition, with those strategies used in crime fiction, writers can develop a creative work that moves beyond the prevailing conventions of crime fiction to incorporate the well-being benefits of trauma fiction. The effect may transform perceptions and assist with reconnection, while also providing a safe narrative space for all readers to work through fears brought on by modern-day graphic exposure to traumatic events. This research may prove significant in developing a framework to cultivate a form of crime fiction that can direct readers into safe, controlled and custom-written environments where they may better empathise, explore and experiment with their responses to trauma.

Biographical note:

With qualifications in arts, education, training, mental health and communications, Leanne Dodd is a doctoral candidate at Central Queensland University, researching the transformative potential of creative writing. Under the pen name of Lea Scott, she has published three crime novels and facilitated writing workshops throughout Queensland. Leanne serves as Vice Chair of the Queensland Writers Centre and is an appointed mentor for emerging crime writers. This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Crime fiction – Trauma fiction – Bibliotherapy – Trauma

Introduction

What is 'trauma' and how can narrative be used to mitigate its threat to an individual's health and wellbeing? The Australian Psychological Society describes trauma as 'very frightening or distressing events [that] may result in a psychological wound or injury' leading to 'a difficulty in coping or functioning normally' following these events (2016: 1). Trauma is not intrinsically about the traumatic event but refers to the often unconscious symptoms and effects caused by the event (Visser 2011: 271). Psychiatric and medical discourses locate trauma within the survivor as various forms of mental illness. Symptoms can vary from hyperarousal of the nervous system, hypervigilance and sleep disturbances to numbing responses such as addiction, self-harm, detachment and dissociation (Herman 1992, Amendiola 1998). Such discourses favour psychiatric and medical approaches to recovery. Because trauma can distort memory, with recurrent intrusive thoughts and memories of the event interrupting the natural flow of an individual's life-story, alternate forms of psychotherapy that use narrative as a tool to reshape life-stories following traumatic events can be an effective approach to resolving these symptoms. This client-oriented approach allows survivors to take agency in re-storying their traumatic experience (White and Epston 1990, Morgan 2000). Tomm purports 'not only do we as humans, give meaning to our experience by "storying" our lives, but we are also empowered to "perform" our lives through knowledge of them' (1990: xi). The potential for anyone to be confronted by trauma has grown in magnitude because as an adjunct to the damaging psychological effects of first-hand trauma, the contemporary world's uncensored media culture exposes society to multiple traumatic events in graphic ways. Narrative provides a safe space for readers to work through the symptoms and fears brought on by personal and modern-day exposure to traumatic events.

Bibliotherapy is a client-oriented therapy that relies on the 'use of books as therapy in the treatment of mental or psychological disorders' (Bibliotherapy 2010), which promotes self-determination. Bibliotherapists may prescribe fictional stories to help clients internalise better coping mechanisms and re-author their life stories but they rarely select crime fiction for this purpose. Bibliotherapists are treated as authorities, deciding which are the 'right' books to meet therapeutic goals and how trauma should look in them, often prescribing guidelines for selecting fiction books of literary merit that promote learning and identification (Shechtman 2009: 2). The subject matter of crime fiction makes it an ideal vehicle for representing trauma so a key question is how crime writers can create works of popular genre crime fiction that express the full complexities of trauma to fit these guidelines. Critics also continue to separate 'valuable' works of literary fiction from popular 'escapist' genre fiction and focus on content as the criteria for judging the transformative value of a fictional work (Manecke 2009). The established approach is challenged herein by suggesting that trauma survivors may form a stronger identification with the embodied and temporal elements that are effected through the narrative strategies employed in trauma fiction, and that integrating these strategies into crime fiction may offer additional criteria by which to judge its therapeutic value.

Trauma fiction is a sub-genre of literary fiction, comprising works classified as 'narratives that help readers to access traumatic experience' (Vickroy 2002: 1).

Trauma fiction functions to provide benefits for readers in several ways. For trauma survivors, it can assist with reconnection – to self, voice, memory, and the social community – connections often lost through the effects of trauma (Goldsmith and Satterlee 2004: 54, Vickroy 2002: 1). While much of this earlier work focuses on interpersonal trauma, recent studies by Brandell and Ringel (2012) and Eaglestone, Durrant and Buelens (2014) take into consideration the political and social dimensions of trauma, highlighting the visibility of traumatic events such as terrorism, massacres and bullying in modern life. Trauma fiction can provide a safe space for readers to confront fears brought about by this trauma culture. Trauma fiction also engages readers in empathetic connection with trauma survivors, which can serve to transform perceptions, remove stigmas and engender a cultural consciousness that may assist in combating the marginalisation which impedes recovery (Goldsmith and Satterlee 2004, Herman 1992, Vickroy 2002). The trauma fiction sub-genre, therefore, satisfies the criteria for bibliotherapy by providing books that meet therapeutic goals.

It becomes evident when examining the narrative strategies employed in trauma writing such as fragmentation and repetition, that writers can align many of them with the conventions and devices employed in crime writing, such as cliffhangers and red herrings. Ways to align these strategies are proposed to help writers to develop crime fiction that has the potential to meet the guidelines of bibliotherapy by moving beyond the prevailing conventions of crime fiction to incorporate the well-being benefits of trauma fiction. Bibliotherapy is presently divided between two major theoretical orientations; affective and cognitive. In affective bibliotherapy the book provides insights to uncover repressed thoughts, feelings, and experiences, but the therapy process is the major therapeutic agent of change, with the therapist's role being critical to assist in the process (Shechtman 2009). This article seeks to assist writers in creating a form of crime fiction that reproduces the narrative benefits of trauma fiction so that bibliotherapists may accept it for therapeutic use. In cognitive bibliotherapy, the book is the major therapeutic agent, guiding the learning process with the therapist's role being advisory or minimal (Shechtman 2009). This article further seeks to assist writers to create crime fiction that not only meets the therapeutic goals of bibliotherapy but also disseminates the benefits of trauma fiction to the broader audience which crime fiction attracts in a 'self-help' manner. The benefit to crime writers in pursuing this approach may prove to be both altruistic in their ability to contribute to personal transformation for their readers, and commercially sound in developing new markets for their work.

The case for using crime fiction in therapy

The concept of gaining therapeutic benefits through the reading of narrative is not new. There is a global network of trained and accredited bibliotherapists prescribing books for all manner of ailments, from adjusting to life transitions to assistance with acute trauma recovery. Allied health practices, library programs and life-skill training organisations deliver bibliotherapy services in Australia and internationally[1]. In reading about comparable situations 'readers may identify with the character and in so doing gain some awareness and understanding of their own motivations, thoughts, and

feelings' (Coleman and Ganong 1990: 327). Bibliotherapists and librarians have traditionally drawn these prescriptions from non-fiction narratives such as self-help books and memoirs. The advantage of using real-life narrative in therapy is that memoirs with traumatic content allow readers to follow their 'human instinct to witness another's pain, to attempt to understand it, and ultimately, to learn from it' (DaPra 2013: 3); however, there are some disadvantages. Non-fiction characters have a finite and limited existence that may not fully align with the individual's experience so there may be a failure to connect with or internalise the story empathetically. Non-fiction stories can also run the risk of being interpreted as criticising and directing rather than promoting self-understanding (Detrixhe 2010: 69). Researchers and therapists, therefore, began to explore the potential of fiction as a medium of transformative benefit.

Why fiction?

As well as having the capacity to bring characters to life indefinitely, readers can engage imaginatively with fiction when it engages their interest and curiosity. Bruner suggests that 'literary texts initiate 'performances' of meaning rather than formulating meaning themselves' (1986: 25). Fictional accounts of trauma are more predisposed to reconstruction by readers because fiction already calls on them to interpret and fill in the gaps in stories through their lived experience. During the process of reading, people affectedly re-engage with their life experiences, including sequential events and identity conclusions that are shaped by them. A process of evolution takes place where readers enter into stories and take them over as their own (White and Epston 1990: 13). People suffering the effects of trauma often get stuck in the story of the traumatic event and therefore alternative stories in other realms of life are overlooked or suppressed by this dominant story. Detrixhe claims that 'interaction with literary characters offers a host of benefits to adult clients, including identification leading to personal change, familiarity with emotional constancy, and strength by example' (2010: 64). Readers may find opportunities to re-author their responses to traumatic events and redevelop their life stories by using fictional characters to help elevate their subordinate stories and explore possibilities for change.

Why crime fiction?

A key feature of crime fiction's appeal is the predictable and comforting way in which the world is restored to order. Despite its potential for amoral content, crime fiction is inherently a moral genre addressing moral questions (Spring and King 2012: 205). Harris claims that although crime fiction 'has the ability to (re)produce terror in its readers, it also can provide those readers with coping strategies' (2013: 124). While it is acknowledged that crime fiction can re-traumatise or vicariously traumatise readers due to its content, Lucas claims that 'as readers we can trust in the extremes of exposure to trauma and anxiety because we know they will carry us safely through to resolution' (2010: 210). This convention opens up space for crime writers to represent productive responses to traumatic experience to a willing and receptive audience.

Crime fiction is a popular form of genre fiction. According to Manecke, critics are prone to denigrate genre fiction reading as escapism and of low value; however, there is a plethora of evidence that suggests escapism can broaden perspectives, widen experiences and equip readers to comprehend real people and situations better. Evidence also suggests that positive behavioural alterations might be a beneficial result of indulging in escapism (2009: 10). Crime writers may generate other incidental benefits when developing this form of fiction for therapeutic purposes. While bibliotherapists require individuals to present for tailored prescriptions or formal therapy, statistics indicate that only one in three Australians suffering from mental health issues seeks out support beyond their own coping mechanisms (Kitchener et al. 2013). Reading this adapted form of crime fiction can alert readers to a range of new possibilities regardless of their willingness to engage with a therapist, which could lead to cognitive changes that encourage them to re-author their lives as described earlier. As Ross points out, readers frequently choose genre fiction books for 'the pleasure anticipated in the reading itself … serendipitously, they encounter material that helps them in the context of their lives' (1999: 785). Crime fiction, therefore, has the potential to provide transformative benefits to a wider range of readers than literary fiction, including those who do not explicitly seek out therapy.

A broader paradigm

The paradigm that currently dominates bibliotherapy promotes learning from the experiences of others through identification, insight and problem-solving (Detrixhe 2010: 62). This model fits the earlier premise discussed, where an individual's knowledge is based on lived experience and readers will interpret what they read based on how it fits with known patterns of events (White and Epston 1990: 2, 9). Shechtman observes that stories prescribed by bibliotherapists often contain specific content that mirrors a reader's experience of traumatic events and models appropriate responses and behavior (2009), which allows them to move through three stages to meet the therapeutic goals of bibliotherapy: identification and projection; abreaction and catharsis; and insight and integration[2] (Pardeck and Pardeck 1984). Bibliotherapists appear to devote less focus to selecting books that contain material that reaches into the internal world of readers and mimics their emotional struggles, anxieties and frustrations.

Herein lies a paradoxical challenge for trauma survivors. Because trauma can be latent and repressed, there is a breadth of embodied feelings and sensations that readers may not be able to recognise in the content of a story. Caruth defines trauma as 'an [event] experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again repeatedly' (1996: 4). She further suggests that the traumatic event cannot become a narrative memory until the trauma survivor can integrate it into a complete story, the comprehension of which is denied by the patchy nature of traumatic memories: the 'trauma thus requires integration, both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure' (1995: 153). A fundamental paradigm challenge needs to be mounted against

this established content approach because the memories of trauma survivors are thus impaired.

Any therapeutic method that necessitates that trauma survivors begin by identifying solely with narrative content that resembles their lived experience will prove problematic in projecting it onto their situation and working through the subsequent stages to integration. Caruth claims that while trauma is relived literally in the nightmares, flashbacks and intrusive thoughts of its victims, the lack of its integration into the consciousness of the victim does not allow conscious recall and thereby restricts access to it (1995). Herman complicates this further by asserting that 'traumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context; rather, they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images' (1992: 38). How, then, can crime writers use narrative differently to mirror these seemingly inaccessible sensations and images to allow readers to construct meanings for their traumatic experience and work toward integration? In recognising that trauma fiction novelists 'have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms' (2004: 3), Whitehead may have alluded to a solution. There is an opportunity here, other than through content, for crime writers to impart knowledge of trauma on their audience by shaping the narrative in the same way that their characters experience and process trauma. Through narrative structure, unconscious and embodied experiences of trauma can be rendered perceptible, which has the potential to create transformational change. This research explores this broader paradigm, investigating whether reflection on the subtext that stems from mimicking the forms and symptoms of trauma in the novel can bring deeper awakening for trauma survivors.

Crime fiction that reaches deeper and accesses the embodied and temporal dimensions of trauma may have more potential for therapeutic use in bibliotherapy. The principle of embodiment holds that 'the body is seen as the centre of identity, inseparable from sensory experience and perception' (MODE 2012). All experience registers in the body through the senses, which leads to unconscious body-wide responses. Trauma fiction's narrative structure allows readers to sense embodied feelings and sensations unconsciously because it mimics these symptoms and effects. Literary critics, therefore, expand definitions of trauma fiction beyond that of purely traumatic content. They associate trauma fiction with a structural and thematically fragmented form, which simulates the temporal disruptions caused by trauma (Collins 2011: 9). Vickroy sums this up when he says writers of trauma fiction 'expand their audiences' awareness of trauma by engaging them with personalized, experientially oriented means of narration that highlight the painful ambivalence that characterizes traumatic memory' (2002: 3). Replicating these strategies in the narrative of crime fiction gives it the same potential to convey transformation benefits as trauma fiction.

In an attempt to identify and reproduce these embodied experiences in crime fiction, it is important to understand how trauma fiction mimics trauma in the narrative. Drawing on trauma theory, literary critics have identified a number of strategies that achieve the effect of mimicking trauma symptoms, which can act as a springboard into association with embodied and temporal dimensions of trauma. The following

analysis demonstrates how writers can align the narrative strategies employed in trauma fiction with those used in crime fiction.

Alignment

The subject matter that crime fiction and trauma fiction writers tackle can be similar in many ways, which places crime fiction in a perfect starting position to attempt to align its narrative strategies with those used in trauma fiction. In defining crime fiction, Spring and King emphasise one of its distinguishing features as having a crime at its core (2012: 172). This crime element can be associated with trauma fiction because it allows writers to explore the traumatic experiences that perpetrators, investigators and victims of crime may have endured and their resultant symptoms.

A review of trauma and crime fiction further indicates that clear parallels exist between both genres' dual narrative structures. Whitehead describes the two contradictory narratives that operate in trauma fiction. 'One is the traumatic event, which is registered rather than experienced. The other is a kind of memory of the event, which takes the form of a perpetual troping of it by the split or dissociated psyche' (2004: 161-2). She distinguishes these two aspects as content (the event) and form (the response). The ultimate goal that trauma fiction writers seek is to integrate these two aspects to achieve recovery for their characters.

Malmgren refers to a similar duality in crime fiction. He contends the crime novel contains two narratives: the first is the story of the crime (the event) which he distinguishes as 'what really happened' and the second is the story of the investigation (the response) which is a search into memory and the past for hidden truths (1997: 121). This method shares a similar pairing of content and form as outlined by Whitehead, with the integration of the two aspects again being the ultimate goal. Malmgren emphasises further:

> The only plot-event that the two narratives [crime and solution] share is, of course, the crime itself… A mystery is inevitably concerned with something over and done with, something in the past. A murder initiates the mystery novel, but the novel is at pains to reconstruct the events leading up to the murder (1997: 122).

Trauma fiction is similarly concerned with 'something in the past'. The plot-event that the two trauma narratives of event and memory share is the traumatic event. While the traumatic event initiates the trauma novel, the novel is at pains to re-memory that event to bring about recovery from the symptomatic response. Following on from these parallels, a mapping of the narrative strategies of trauma fiction proceeds together with suggestions for how crime writers can align them with the strategies they use in crime fiction.

Surrender, a novel by Australian author Sonya Harnett (2005), presents a good example from which to explore the crossover of these strategies as it contains elements of both trauma and crime. An award-winning literary novel, one reviewer, Dianne Dempsey, has described *Surrender* as 'a psychological thriller and an astute depiction of the impact of suffering on a child's mind' (2005). As a result of childhood abuse, its protagonist, Anwell, develops a dissociative disorder which splits

his personality into good and evil alters, Gabriel and Finnegan. As children, the alters make a pact which has deadly consequences.

> You will only be good things – you'll never get angry or fight. And I will only be bad things – I will always get angry and fight. We'll be like opposites – like pictures in the water (38-9).

The town police officer, Constable McIlwraith, attempts to solve crimes of theft, arson and murder, that are carried out by the alter Finnegan as he seeks revenge on those who have harmed Gabriel, leading to the bloody murder of his parents with a hatchet.

Surrender illustrates the presence of the unconscious and embodied material discussed earlier, with another reviewer recognising that it leaves readers 'listening for the subtext that whispers between its lines' (Williamson 2005). The intent is that writers may use and adapt the tools that follow to create crime fiction that provides readers with similar benefits to those gained by reading trauma fiction.

Fragmentation

Fragmentation of the narrative is a commonly employed strategy in trauma fiction, characterised by the use of devices such as non-linear narrative, delayed narrative, textual gaps, interruptions, disjunction and fracturing (Felman and Laub 1992, Whitehead 2004, Visser 2011). In *Surrender*, Hartnett fragments the story using a non-linear narrative, which 'conveys the fragmented nature of traumatic memory' (Goldsmith and Satterlee 2004: 52). Time flows back and forth between Anwell's childhood and the present where he lies in bed dying at the age of twenty. Hartnett does not make the fracturing of time explicit but signposts it only by the sudden change in setting and the mention of Anwell's present illness. These scenes interrupt the flow of time and therefore have the effect of intruding into the narrative in a manner similar to the way that traumatic memories intrude into a trauma survivor's thoughts.

Writers of crime fiction also employ narrative strategies associated with the distortion of time. Todorov claims time is a critical design feature in crime fiction 'leading us slowly backwards from effect to cause' (1977: 47). Porter agrees but additionally claims it is 'a genre committed to an act of recovery' (1981: 29) in which forward motion is also a vital feature. The task of the detective in crime fiction is to restore order by making sense of fragmented and disjointed clues and then work backwards by connecting these clues while concurrently moving forward to solve the crime (Scaggs 2005: 72). This strategy can be seen to be analogous with the aim in trauma fiction to move back to recover memory in order to move forward beyond the symptoms. This is represented diagrammatically below in Figure 1.

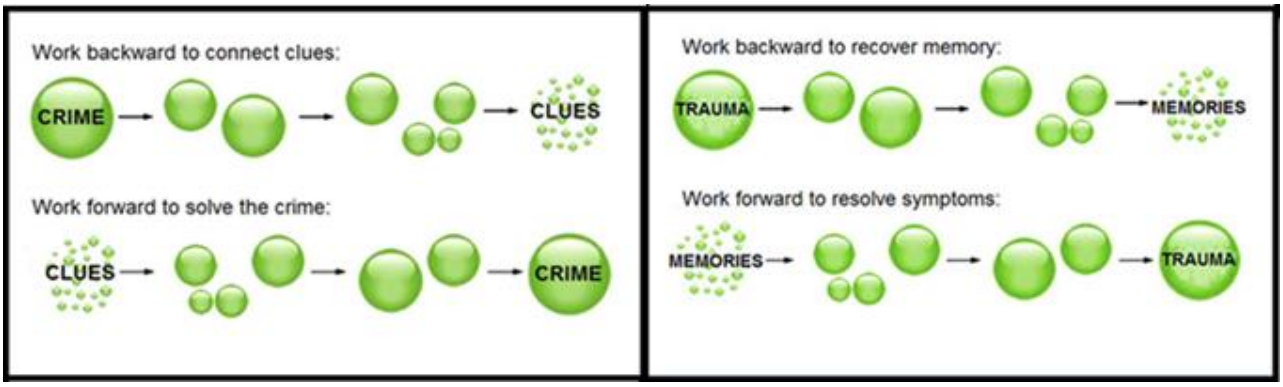

Fig. 1. Fragmentation in crime fiction and trauma fiction

Devices familiar to crime fiction writers offer tools with which they can mimic the effects of trauma. Analepsis (or flashback) is a device used in crime fiction to reveal clues about events from the past. This strategy can resonate with the fragmentation seen in trauma fiction if these transitions from the present to the past are presented out of chronological order, mimicking the way traumatic memory is random in its intrusive effect. A further device used in crime fiction to fragment time is the so-called 'cliffhanger', where writers leave a scene hanging at a precarious moment then move on to another scene (Spring and King 2012: 109). The textual gap between the cliffhanger and the resolution of that scene can be seen to echo the approach used by writers of trauma fiction to mimic temporal gaps in memory. Hartnett creates these gaps in *Surrender* by alternating her chapters between the two alters, moving backwards and forwards through time from one chapter to the next. Crime fiction novels often follow a similar structure. If writers give attention to creating textual gaps at a critical point where memory is either likely to fail a trauma survivor, or be triggered by an associated experience, then alignment of the strategy between trauma and crime fiction can be achieved.

Repetition

Repetition is another narrative strategy used in trauma fiction, which has been observed to mimic the effects of trauma through devices such as analepsis, mirroring, recurring motifs and intertextuality (Hartman 2003, Russell 2009, Vickroy 2002 and Whitehead 2004). Whitehead advocates 'one of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction is the device of repetition, which can act at the levels of language, imagery or plot' (2004: 86). In *Surrender*, Anwell is repeatedly unmoored by flashbacks of his disabled brother Vernon, whose death haunts him at all of these levels. The plot unveils that Anwell had shut Vernon in an old refrigerator to keep him quiet to avoid the wrath of their abusive mother and that this led to his death by suffocation. The narrative flashbacks to images and descriptions of this traumatic event mimic the nature of traumatic memory, similar to the way in which trauma survivors experience repetitive intrusions of memory.

Crime fiction writers also employ strategies that make use of repetition. The formulaic model of the crime novel presents readers with a form of repetition where

stories exploring similar kinds of traumatic experience can be graphically told yet contained within the form of the genre. Repetition is a way of desensitising readers when forced to confront the incomprehensible subject matter of crime novels, which allows them to assimilate the nature of trauma gradually (Lucas 2004: 207). This approach aligns with the aims of trauma fiction to provide a safe space for readers to witness trauma and confront their fears. Lucas likens it to the 'rhythmic rocking of a distressed child' (207). This form of repetition is accomplished using similar means as trauma fiction, including analepsis, mirroring, recurring motifs and intertextuality (Lucas 2004, Lloyd 2014). In *Surrender*, Hartnett employs the recurring motif of the predator to describe the killer. Depictions of Finnegan compare him to a wolf, a hyena and a tiger to mention a few. This motif serves to portray the killer as a wild and uncontainable hunter. Readers are not unduly shocked by the brutal actions of the character because this motif is replicated in numerous crime fiction novels. These devices, already familiar to crime fiction readers, could be turned to further use to mimic the repetitive intrusions of memory suffered by characters that have experienced trauma due to the crime event within the novel, as in the earlier example of Anwell's repetitive memories of Vernon's death in *Surrender*.

Whitehead additionally speaks of how circular narrative can be used to conceal the traumatic event in trauma fiction by creating 'the "central silence" … around which the remainder of the narrative "orbits"' (2004: 137), revealing only the trauma's effects using repetition (see Fig. 2). Harnett uses circular narrative in *Surrender* to orbit around the central silent event that leads Anwell to his deathbed where we first meet him, and from which he subsequently narrates the story. The reader is exposed only to the repetitive effects of Anwell's trauma until close to the end of the novel, when is it revealed that he has slain his parents with a hatchet.

'Red herrings', false clues planted by the author, are stock devices used in crime fiction 'to distract the reader by dragging an enticing alternate scent across the story' (Spring and King 2012: 214). These red herrings draws the reader repeatedly into an alternate storyline that obscures the crime, creating a circular narrative that reflects that described by Whitehead (see Fig. 2).

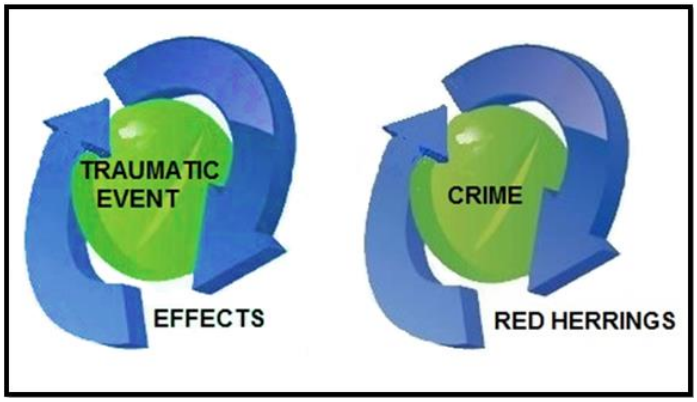

Fig. 2. Circular plot in trauma fiction and crime fiction

Marcus corroborates this by describing how the investigator can be 'belied by the circularity of the plot' where the narrative 'disrupts chronology, repeatedly reverting

to events that subsequently turn out to be imaginings or speculations' (2009: 256). In crime fiction, the circular plot could be used to conceal the traumatic event while focusing on the effects of the trauma to encourage stronger identification with the embodied and temporal elements of trauma.

Language

The use of stylistic language is a common feature in trauma fiction. Its role is to evoke rather than represent horror and violence. Stylistic language attempts to distance violence for readers by juxtaposing violent scenes with the aesthetic, using 'romantic, mythical language' (Russell 2009: 119). While ethically this could be considered as a way of avoiding uncomfortable realities, the use of stylised violence acts as a means to separate the violence from its context, allowing readers a window through which to view trauma while providing them with a filtered space in which to process their emotional response. This concept is taken up by Collins who considers readers 'need to find beauty in the text, as a redemptive alternative to the violence (2001: 13). *Surrender* brims with poetic imagery from its first line: 'I am dying: it's a beautiful word. Like the long slow sigh of a cello: dying' (Hartnett 2005: 1). This image distances us from the horror of Anwell's imminent death. Stylistic language continues to be used throughout the novel to separate readers from its gruesome events.

Metaphor, in its simplest form, is an expression where one thing is likened to something else with similar properties, which is used by writers of trauma fiction in a specific way. Trauma survivors often use metaphors to express experiences of traumatic events that they find difficult to express literally. According to Amendiola 'metaphor provides an altered frame of reference that allows [trauma survivors] to entertain novel experience without physiological hyperarousal and attending negative affect' (1998: 1). Recovery comes from the safe reassociation to the experience. In *Surrender*, wild animal metaphors are used to describe Finnegan. Metaphor is used to compare him to a wolf, a hyena and a tiger. His wildness sets him apart so Gabriel does not recognise this part of himself and can blame the untameable Finnegan for his misdeeds.

Some crime writers also use stylistic language. Spring and King explain that mystery 'may be permitted a more leisurely approach, with long descriptions and meandering conversations' (2012: 174). This suggests that writers may be able to more closely align the mystery's language style with the aesthetic language of trauma fiction to provide a safe space for readers to view and process trauma. However, while the crime thriller's language style is predominantly about pace, there are times when the reader needs a breather from the action. Hayward suggests that 'different language practices will be required to access different perspectives and to think outside of what is routinely thought' (2003: 10). Crime writers can use stylistic language and metaphor for this purpose so long they are cautious not jolt the reader out of the story.

Language can also be manipulated to mimic the effects of trauma. Schaub (2016) describes several ways to achieve this in trauma fiction. The first is to replicate the embodied dimensions of trauma by turning nouns into verbs. An example verbalised

by Schaub at a recent conference is 'you've puddled my body' to convey a sense of distressed immersion and drowning. She also suggests that stylistic fragmentation of sentences can produce a disjunctive presentation of language that imitates trauma. 'Language narrows in on small details recorded in elliptical sentences, whose choppy structures' (Schaub 2016: 1) convey the stress and terror of uncertainty and the pain that trauma inflicts. In addition to removing verbs to create this effect, removing 'I' from the narrative can replicate the voicelessness experienced by trauma survivors, as the following example illustrates.

> I feel his breath close to my face. I turn. I run at a swift pace.
> Feel his breath close to my face. Turn. Run at a swift pace.

Fast-paced crime fiction uses similar language conventions. Spring and King explain that 'a thriller tends to have stripped-down prose, particularly as the action accelerates, with short sentences and paragraphs, sharp verbs, crisp dialogue' (2012: 174). Aligning these crime fiction conventions with the strategies used in trauma fiction can impart the embodied and temporal dimensions of trauma to readers through the fragmented language structure.

Place

Trauma fiction writers use place as a motif to give readers a position from which to gain access to the traumatic event (Baer 2000: 48). This strategy allows them to return to it, as occurs in recurrent intrusive flashbacks. Whitehead asserts 'all efforts to confront and remember the past must be preceded by a consideration of the perspective from which we, as belated witnesses, view the event' (2004: 48). Given the shocking nature of traumatic experience, this narrative motif is likely to be constructed through the use of grim and threatening imagery which may further evoke the sensation of these memories. Hartnett depicts a bleak picture of the inward-looking small town that confines Anwell in *Surrender*.

> Nobody chooses to come here. In this little town ringed by shark-tooth mountains we are far, far away. We only know each other. And the names on the gravestones stay the same (8).

Place can also be perceived to work as a motif in crime fiction. Lloyd remarks that 'crime fiction is typically depicted through landscapes … which are grim, threatening places, hiding darkness the detective … must penetrate in order to survive' (2014: 105). Harnett portrays grim descriptions of the landscape in *Surrender*, particularly after Finnegan scorches it in his arson attempts: 'The rocks are black with rotten moss … The winter sun glows but down here all is gloom … The twigs are broken and the earth is scuffed' (44).

To evoke the sensation of traumatic memory in the crime novel, writers can use place as a motif to represent a threatening landscape and as a place from which to witness the traumatic event of the crime, thereby bringing the role of place in both genres into alignment.

Intimacy

Various devices are employed in trauma fiction to position the reader inside the narrative as a witness or empathetic listener to increase their awareness of the effects of trauma. Interior monologue, literary verbalisation, first person testimony, writing from the child's perspective and narrating to an internal addressee are devices articulated by some researchers and critics to achieve this aim (Goldsmith and Satterlee 2004, Hartman 2003, Vickroy 2002, Whitehead 2004). In *Surrender*, Hartnett allows readers to witness the first person testimony of Gabriel's abuse. His interior monologue reveals its effect on him as he narrates the story from both his child and adult perspectives. Harnett then alternates between Gabriel and Finnegan in first person perspective, dedicating to each their own chapters to identify them. The twist, which the author does not reveal until toward the end of the novel, is that Gabriel and Finnegan, and indeed Anwell, are all the sub-personalities of the same person, so readers witness the same trauma on different levels.

Researchers observe that first person perspective is the preeminent technique used in detective novels, which reinforces the process of identification between the reader and protagonist (Lucas 2004: 211, Malmgren 1997: 126). Spring and King agree that a single first-person point of view can offer the greatest chance for intimacy. However, they argue that 'first-person narration can be paradoxically distancing from the character, since the reader has no chance to witness those unconscious gestures and tics' (2012: 67) that reveal that what a person says and does may not be what they are thinking. Some crime writers prefer to use third-person perspective to provide an alternative viewpoint and offer this additional sense of dimension but this reduces intimacy and may therefore unconsciously impact on the reader's ability to identify with the character. Writers can resolve this by creating a character voiced in first-person as an unreliable narrator, which Spring and King suggest is a very effective device to add to the mystery of the novel (2012). Todorov agrees; 'there is … no way to know if the narrator is being entirely honest with herself – and thus the reader. This drawback can be worked to magnificent effect if the reader is made to suspect a degree of self-delusion, hearing the off-notes of an unreliable narrator' (1977: 68). In this way, writers can preserve intimacy and maintain the position of the reader inside the narrative.

Resolution

In terms of delivering benefits for readers, Whitehead endorses a neat resolution for trauma fiction writers, where the ghosts of the past are exorcised creating a cathartic ending for the characters and the reader. She refers to 'our need for a past that is neatly packaged and easily resolved' (2004: 19), where order is restored, the healing process is complete, and the victim becomes a survivor.

Crime fiction is primarily concerned with predictable and comforting endings in which the world is restored to order. Harris observes that the crime writer's chief method for achieving resolution is to bring about endings where perpetrators get punished for their crimes (2013). In *Surrender*, Hartnett generates the kind of restoration of order that crime readers seek. In the end, Gabriel (Anwell) recognises

that the only way to destroy his alter, Finnegan, is to surrender his life. While this is not a traditional path to justice, this ending does bring a sense of resolution for readers as Anwell attains absolution and punishes the perpetrator Finnegan for his crimes, and life in the town is restored to order as the fires stop. Orford contends that crime fiction is 'a fairy tale genre in many ways' (cited in Harris 2013: 126). Fairy tales work on conscious and unconscious levels to give meaning to life and guide readers through existential situations (Manecke 2009: 7). If writers provide neat resolutions and cathartic endings, the crime novel has the potential to do the same for trauma survivors.

Conclusion

We live in a world that increasingly exposes us to trauma, leading some people to experience symptoms of anxiety, anger and disconnect. Using narrative to re-shape traumatic memory by creating alternative life-stories provides one approach that allows trauma survivors to take agency in their recovery. While bibliotherapy uses fiction for this purpose, it is currently dominated by a paradigm that privileges content over the more embodied and temporal elements in the subtext of the narrative. Bibliotherapy has established strong roots, but Detrixhe contends that 'attempting to control literary content and thus client reaction is a battle no one can win' (2010: 69). The challenge is intensified when the reader's memory of events is impaired by traumatic experience.

In an attempt to broaden the existing paradigm, this article demonstrates that crime fiction has the potential to be acceptable for therapy because of its ability to be aligned with the strategies that provide therapeutic benefits in trauma fiction. By employing the strategies discussed, crime writers may enable readers to access not only content, but also unconscious subtext, to cultivate identification with the narrative through the embodied and temporal dimensions of trauma. While arguments against such a prescriptive approach to writing may be mounted, this is because prescriptiveness generally focusses on the 'rightness' of language. In this case, the prescriptive approach does not relate so much to language but to form.

This new and innovative way of navigating the nexus between trauma and crime fiction seeks to assist writers to create crime fiction that meets the criteria for therapeutic purposes. Additional advantages of this method include reaching a more expansive genre fiction audience for both altruistic and commercial benefit, while also helping readers to absorb the shock of trauma, process their emotional responses, and develop an awareness of the issues facing trauma survivors (Whitehead 2004). This research may prove significant in developing a framework to cultivate a form of crime fiction that can direct readers into safe, controlled and custom-written environments where they may better explore and experiment with their responses to trauma.

Endnotes

1. Indicative of these organisations are: Bibliotherapy Australia, which aims to promote Australian initiatives using literature therapeutically; Books on Prescription, a bibliotherapy

reading scheme endorsed by health professionals and available through public libraries across Central and Far Western NSW; Australian Library and Information Association, which has produced a list of 252 'Books that make you feel good about life' to support Books on Prescription; The School of Life (founded in UK and now in Australia), which lists bibliotherapists who prescribe select works of philosophy, poetry and creative non-fiction, and provide consultations; Central Michigan University's Bibliotherapy Education Project, which provides resources and links to assist with evaluating materials for bibliotherapy, and the International Federation for Biblio/Poetry Therapy, which trains and credentials practitioners in the field of biblio/poetry therapy.

2. The three stages of bibliotherapy are defined as: identification and projection (clients identify with a character and events in a story, and with a therapist's guidance, come to recognize themselves in the life and problems of the character); abreaction and catharsis (clients experience a release pent-up emotions under safe conditions); and, insight and integration (clients become aware that there is a problem in their life and possible solutions for them). (Pardeck and Pardeck 1984, Shechtman 2009).

Works cited

Amendolia, R 1998 'A narrative constructivist perspective of treatment of PTSD with Ericksonian hypnosis and EMDR', *American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress, Inc*.: http://www.aaets.org/article32.htm (accessed 6 November 2016)

Australian Library and Information Association 2016 'Books that make you feel good about life': https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/List%20Books%20that%20make%20you%20feel%20good%20about%20life%20final-%20landscape.pdf (accessed 30 October 2016)

Australian Psychological Society (APS) 2016 'Understanding and managing psychological trauma': http://www.psychology.org.au/publications/tip_sheets/trauma (accessed 12 May 2015)

Baer, U 2000 'To give memory a place: Holocaust photography and the landscape tradition', *Representations*, 69, 38-63

Bibliotherapy 2010 *Oxford Dictionary of English* 3rd ed, Oxford UP, Oxford, 823

Bibliotherapy Australia: https://bibliotherapyaustralia.com.au (accessed 30 October 2016)

Books on Prescription: https://booksonprescription.com.au/ (accessed 30 October 2016)

Brandell, JR and S Ringel (eds) 2012 *Trauma: Contemporary directions in theory, practice, and research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks

Bruner, J 1986 *Actual minds, possible worlds*, Harvard UP, Cambridge

Caruth, C 1995 *Trauma: Explorations in memory*, John Hopkins UP, Baltimore

Caruth, C 1996 *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative and history*, John Hopkins UP, Baltimore

Central Michigan University 'Bibliotherapy Education Project': http://bibliotherapy.ehs.cmich.edu/ (accessed 30 October 2016)

Coleman, M and LH Ganong 1990 'The uses of juvenile fiction and self-help with stepfamilies', *Journal of Counseling & Development* 68: 327-331

Collins, J 2011 'The ethics and aesthetics of representing trauma: The textual politics of Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47, 1: 5-17

DaPra, T 2013 'Writing memoir and writing for therapy', *Creative Nonfiction* 48: http://www.creativenonfiction.org/therapy-memoir (accessed 9 September 2015)

Dempsey, D 2005 'Surrender', *The Age* (19 February): http://www.theage.com.au/news/Reviews/Surrender/2005/02/18/1108609358623.html (accessed 27 September 2014)

Detrixhe, JJ 2010 'Souls in jeopardy: Questions and innovations for bibliotherapy with fiction', *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development* 49: 58-72

Eaglestone, R, S Durrant and G Buelens 2014 *The future of trauma theory: Contemporary literary criticism*, Routledge, New York

Felman, S and D Laub 1992 *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis and history*, Routledge, New York

Firman, J and A Gila 1997 *The primal wound: A transpersonal view of trauma, addiction and growth*, State U of New York P, New York

Goldsmith, RE and M Satterlee 2004 'Representations of trauma in clinical psychology and fiction', *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 5, 2: 35-59

Harris, M 2013 '"You think it's possible to fix broken things?": Terror in the South African crime fiction of Margie Orford and Jassy Mackenzie', *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 31, 2: 122-31

Hartman, G 2003 'Trauma within the limits of literature', *European Journal of English Studies* 7, 3: 257-74

Harnett, S 2005 *Surrender*, Candlewick P, Cambridge

Hayward, M 2003 'Critiques of narrative therapy: A personal response', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* 24, 4: 183-89

Herman, J 1992 *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence – from domestic abuse to political terror*, Basic, New York

International Federation for Biblio/Poetry Therapy: http://ifbpt.org (accessed 30 October 2016)

Kitchener, B, A Jorm and C Kelly 2013 *Mental health first aid manual*, Mental Health First Aid Australia, Parkville

Lloyd, J R 2014, 'Talking to the dead – the voice of the victim in crime fiction', *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice & Theory of Creative Writing* 11, 1: 100-08

Lucas, R 2004 'Anxiety and its antidotes: Patricia Cornwell and the forensic body', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 15, 2: 207-22

Malmgren, C D 1997 'Anatomy of murder: Mystery, detective, and crime fiction', *Journal of Popular Culture* 30, 4: 115-135

Manecke, U 2009 'Bibliotherapy: The restorative power of reading', Masters Dissertation, U of Sheffield, Sheffield

Marcus, L 2009 'Detection and literary fiction' in M Priestman (ed), *The Cambridge companion to crime fiction*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge

MODE 2012 'Embodiment' *Glossary of multimodal terms*: https://multimodalityglossary.wordpress.com/embodiment (accessed 6 November 2016)

Morgan, A 2000 *What is narrative therapy*?: *An easy to read introduction*, Dulwich Centre Publications, Adelaide

Pardeck, JT and JA Pardeck 1984 'Treating abused children through bibliotherapy', *Early Child Development and Care* 16: 195-204

Porter, D 1981 *The pursuit of crime: Art and ideology in detective fiction*, Yale UP, New Haven

Ross, CS 1999 'Finding without seeking: the information encounter in the context of reading for pleasure', *Information Processing and Management*, 35: 738-799

Russell, RR 2009 'Embodiments of history and delayed confessions: Graham Swift's "Waterland" as trauma fiction', *Papers on Language & Literature, Illinois* 45.2: 115

Scaggs, J 2005 *Crime fiction (the new critical idiom)*, Routledge, New York

Schaub, D 2016 '"Pinned limb to limb by a ton of rocks": Annihilation in the face of captivity and torture in Alan Cumyn's *Man of Bone*', Paper presented at *6th Global Conference, Trauma: Theory and*

Practice, 11–13 March 2016, Budapest, Hungary: http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/at-the-interface/evil/trauma/call-for-papers/conference-programme-abstracts-and-papers/abstracts-listed-by-author-m-z (accessed 25 February 2016)

Shechtman, Z 2009 *Treating child and adolescent aggression through bibliotherapy: The Springer series on human exceptionality*, Springer Science + Business Media, LLC, New York

Spring, M and L King 2012 *The Arvon book of crime and thriller writing*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London

The School of Life: http://www.theschooloflife.com (accessed 30 October 2016)

Tomm, K 1990 'Forward' in M White and D Epston, *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*, Norton, New York: vii–xi

Todorov, T 1977 *The poetics of prose*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford

Vickroy, L 2002 *Trauma and survival in contemporary fiction*, U of Virginia P, Charlottesville

Visser, I 2011 'Trauma theory and postcolonial literary studies', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47, 3: 270-82

White, M and D Epston, D 1990 *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*, Norton, New York

Whitehead, A 2004 *Trauma fiction*, Edinburgh UP, Edinburgh

Williamson S 2005 'Surrender by Sonya Hartnett: A dangerous and beautiful bargain', *Pop Matters*, http://www.popmatters.com/review/surrender-2005 (accessed 1 June 2016)