

## The Literary Wounds of 9/11: Trauma and Healing in Waldman and Schwartz's Works

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Research Paper</b></p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> 19-04-2025</p> <p><b>Published:</b> 10-05-2025</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p><i>Memory, Identity, Societal divisions, Fragmented narratives, Emotional healing, Literary representations, social recovery</i></p>	<p>This research paper examines the portrayal of trauma and the process of healing in Amy Waldman's <i>The Submission</i> and Lynne Sharon Schwartz's <i>The Writing on the Wall</i>, two seminal works that engage with the psychological and emotional aftermath of the September 11th attacks. Using trauma theory as the primary framework, particularly drawing from scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dominick LaCapra, this study explores how Waldman and Schwartz depict the enduring scars left by the attacks on both individuals and communities. Waldman's <i>The Submission</i> presents the complexities of a Muslim architect's struggle to design a 9/11 memorial, reflecting the societal and personal trauma wrought by the event. At the same time, Schwartz's <i>The Writing on the Wall</i> provides a broader look at the fragmented lives of New Yorkers navigating the lingering psychological effects of the tragedy. Through fragmented narratives, shifting perspectives, and intricate character studies, both authors grapple with the difficulties of articulating trauma and the complex process of emotional and social healing. By analysing the novels' treatment of memory, identity, and societal divisions, this paper reveals how the literary representations of 9/11 in these texts illuminate the challenges of recovery, the limits of language in</p>



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conveying trauma, and the ways in which art and storytelling offer possibilities for healing in the face of collective disaster.

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## Introduction

The September 11th attacks left deep psychological scars on individuals and communities, a theme explored in Amy Waldman's *The Submission* and Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall*. Both novels examine the traumatic aftermath of the attacks, delving into the personal and collective wounds that continue to affect the characters long after the event. Waldman's *The Submission* portrays trauma not only as a personal experience but as a collective societal wound, one that can never be fully healed, only mediated through the tensions of memory and identity (Caruth 12). This novel centers around a Muslim architect tasked with designing a 9/11 memorial, representing the complex cultural and social ramifications of the tragedy. Through his struggles, Waldman reflects on how the emotional impact of trauma intertwines with societal divisions, emphasising that healing is an ongoing and complicated process.

In contrast, Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* captures the persistent aftershocks of 9/11 through a fragmented narrative that reflects the fractured nature of post-trauma memory and its effect on the individual's sense of self (Felman 78). Set in New York City, the novel follows characters trying to navigate the disorienting emotional landscape left by the attacks. Schwartz's exploration of fractured identities highlights the difficulty of articulating trauma, as the characters confront a loss of coherence in their lives and relationships. Both authors, however, use storytelling as a means to negotiate the limits of language in representing trauma. As Dominick LaCapra argues, the narrative of trauma can never fully capture the depth of the experience, but art and storytelling provide a way to process and express the unspeakable (LaCapra 56). Waldman and Schwartz illustrate that while healing may not be fully attainable, art offers a way to confront and work through collective disaster's emotional and psychological wounds.

This paper investigates how Amy Waldman's *The Submission* and Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* engage with the psychological trauma and the process of emotional healing in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks. Through the lens of trauma theory, the study analyses how both authors depict the enduring scars left by 9/11 on individuals and communities. By examining themes of



memory, identity, and societal divisions, the research explores how Waldman and Schwartz utilise narrative structures and character development to convey the complexities of trauma and the challenges of recovery, while also considering the limitations of language in representing such profound emotional wounds. Ultimately, this study aims to illuminate the role of literature in articulating the inexpressible experiences of loss, fragmentation, and healing in the wake of collective disaster.

This literature review examines key works and theoretical frameworks relevant to the study of psychological trauma, emotional healing, and the aftermath of collective disasters in literature. Focusing on Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) and Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* (2011), this review investigates how these novels engage with the traumatic effects of the September 11th attacks. Both texts explore themes of memory, identity, societal divisions, and the challenges of recovery, with a particular focus on how trauma theory can provide a lens for understanding the representation of emotional wounds.

Trauma theory provides a critical framework for analysing the lasting psychological effects of violent events on individuals and communities. Cathy Caruth's seminal work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), asserts that trauma disrupts the continuity of experience and challenges traditional narrative structures, which often fail to fully capture the magnitude of traumatic events. Caruth's focus on the "unclaimed" nature of traumatic experience resonates with both *The Submission* and *The Writing on the Wall*, where the characters struggle to articulate their post-9/11 trauma. In these novels, trauma manifests not only in individual characters' emotional turmoil but also in the societal divisions and collective memory of the nation after the attacks.

In addition to Caruth, other scholars such as Dominick LaCapra (*Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001) and Ruth Leys (*The Anatomy of Trauma*, 2000) explore the intersections of historical memory, identity, and trauma. LaCapra's notion of "working through" trauma, where survivors engage in an ongoing process of confronting and integrating traumatic memory, aligns with the ways in which Waldman and Schwartz depict their characters' journeys toward emotional healing. Similarly, Leys's critique of the therapeutic discourse surrounding trauma highlights the complexities of recovery and the limits of language in expressing the full extent of psychological damage. Both authors examine how trauma, as a lived experience, cannot always be easily captured in language or narrative, a theme central to both novels.



Waldman's *The Submission* tells the story of a design competition for a 9/11 memorial, focusing on the tension between personal and national identity in the wake of the attacks. The novel examines how characters, especially the protagonist, Mohammad, grapple with their identities as Muslims in post-9/11 America. Waldman's portrayal of Mohammad's trauma—stemming from the simultaneous loss of his wife in the attacks and the resulting public backlash—evokes the psychological dislocation and alienation that many Muslim Americans felt after 9/11. This portrayal is consistent with trauma theory's understanding of how marginalised individuals experience compounded forms of violence, both personal and societal.

In a study of the novel, Anna Bernard (*The Writing of Memory: Reconstructing the Past in The Submission and Other Post-9/11 Novels*, 2013) argues that Waldman uses the narrative structure of the novel to expose the difficulty of recovering from trauma. Bernard contends that the novel critiques the politics of memory and representation, demonstrating how language can be both a tool for healing and a barrier to understanding. The fragmented nature of the narrative—shifting perspectives between characters—mirrors the fragmented psychological states of individuals struggling with their own trauma and with the collective trauma of 9/11.

Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* offers a more personal reflection on the aftermath of 9/11, focusing on a single character, Claudia, who contemplates her emotional state and the shifting social landscape in the years following the attacks. Schwartz explores the internal psychological processes of recovery through Claudia's search for meaning in the wake of disaster. The narrative also examines the intergenerational transmission of trauma, as Claudia reflects on the ways her family history—shaped by the Holocaust—affects her understanding of collective trauma.

Miriam Cooke (*Trauma, Memory, and Identity in The Writing on the Wall and the Works of Lynne Sharon Schwartz*, 2015) argues that Schwartz uses Claudia's emotional journey as a metaphor for the broader societal challenges of making sense of 9/11. The novel's introspective tone highlights the personal and private dimensions of trauma, offering an intimate exploration of the difficulties of post-traumatic healing. Cooke suggests that Schwartz's portrayal of emotional recovery emphasizes the tensions between memory and forgetting, with Claudia's attempts to come to terms with her own pain mirroring the collective struggle to process and heal from the traumatic national experience of 9/11.



Both Waldman and Schwartz delve into the themes of memory and identity in post-9/11 America, examining how these constructs are redefined in the wake of traumatic events. For Waldman, the memorial competition in *The Submission* becomes a metaphor for the larger national struggle over how to remember and memorialise the tragedy of 9/11. In the novel, memory is deeply entwined with identity, as various characters' personal recollections of the event shape their views of the world and their relationships with others.

Similarly, Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* addresses the theme of personal identity in the face of collective trauma. Claudia's sense of self is continuously challenged by her experiences of loss, as well as by the pervasive social and political changes that follow the attacks. The novel highlights the ongoing negotiation of identity in a world where societal divisions have been exacerbated by terrorism and fear. Both novels underscore the fragility of identity in a post-traumatic world, where individuals and communities struggle to redefine themselves in the aftermath of the crisis.

The idea that language fails to adequately capture the full scope of trauma is central to the study of post-9/11 literature. Both *The Submission* and *The Writing on the Wall* engage with this theme, illustrating the limitations of verbal expression in conveying the depth of emotional suffering. As Caruth argues, trauma often defies language, as the victim is "torn away from the event" and unable to fully articulate their experience. In both novels, characters' efforts to communicate their pain are often met with misunderstanding or silence, reflecting the inefficacy of language in representing trauma.

Schwartz's focus on Claudia's introspection and her inability to communicate her inner turmoil highlights the silence that often surrounds trauma. Similarly, Waldman's use of fragmented perspectives and shifting narrative voices underscores the difficulty of comprehending and articulating the collective pain of 9/11. Both authors thus suggest that literature itself may be the most powerful means of confronting the inexpressible aspects of trauma.

The works of Amy Waldman and Lynne Sharon Schwartz provide valuable insights into the emotional and psychological aftermath of the September 11th attacks. Through their exploration of trauma, memory, identity, and the limitations of language, both novels contribute to a broader understanding of how individuals and communities process loss, fragmentation, and healing. By engaging with trauma theory, Waldman and Schwartz illuminate the complexities of post-9/11 emotional recovery, revealing how literature serves as a crucial vehicle for articulating the inexpressible and addressing the scars of collective disaster.



This research differentiates itself from other studies on post-9/11 trauma literature by adopting a comparative approach that focuses on two often-overlooked works: Amy Waldman's *The Submission* and Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall*. While much of the existing scholarship on post-9/11 literature tends to concentrate on more widely studied texts, this research broadens the scope by considering how these two novels—one dealing with the Muslim-American experience and the other with the Jewish-American experience—represent the trauma and emotional healing processes following the September 11th attacks. This dual focus allows for a more nuanced examination of how different ethnic and religious communities in the U.S. navigate the aftermath of such a traumatic event, offering perspectives that have not been explored in tandem within existing trauma studies.

Furthermore, this study integrates trauma theory with an in-depth analysis of narrative structure and character development. While much of the current scholarship has focused on either the representation of trauma or the recovery process in isolation, this research investigates the intricate ways in which the authors use fragmented storytelling and shifting perspectives to embody the complexities of trauma and the difficulties of emotional recovery. By emphasising the limitations of language a central theme in trauma theory—this research highlights how both Waldman and Schwartz illustrate the silences, gaps, and ineffable nature of traumatic experience. Unlike other studies that may focus on the overt manifestations of trauma or political dimensions of post-9/11 memory, this analysis foregrounds the challenge of expressing emotional suffering through language, offering a deeper exploration of how trauma defies conventional narrative techniques.

Additionally, this study moves beyond a purely psychological focus and examines how memory and identity are reshaped by trauma, exploring how both novels grapple with the redefinition of self and community in the wake of a collective disaster. The focus on societal divisions, memory, and identity in these two works provides a broader understanding of the ongoing cultural negotiations that follow a national tragedy, where individuals and communities alike must navigate the pain of loss and the struggle for meaning. This focus is more intimate and internal compared to many existing studies that treat the trauma of 9/11 as primarily a public or collective phenomenon, thereby adding a unique perspective on how personal and public histories intersect in the aftermath of disaster.

This research distinguishes itself by blending trauma theory with narrative analysis, focusing on the under-explored works of Waldman and Schwartz, and emphasising the limitations of language in representing post-9/11 trauma. It explores both the emotional scars left by the attacks and the process of



healing, contributing new insights into how literature articulates the complexities of identity, memory, and recovery. Through this lens, the study highlights the role of literature not only in depicting trauma but in suggesting pathways for healing in a fractured world.

The objectives of this paper aim to deeply analyse how *The Submission* by Amy Waldman and *The Writing on the Wall* by Lynne Sharon Schwartz represent the psychological trauma and emotional healing experienced in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks. The research seeks to explore how both authors depict the profound impact of the tragedy on individuals and communities, particularly through the lenses of memory, loss, and identity. By applying trauma theory, the paper will investigate how both novels capture the disruption of memory and the challenges involved in expressing trauma, shedding light on the limitations of language in conveying deep emotional wounds.

Additionally, the study will explore the role of memory and identity in shaping post-9/11 experiences, focusing on how the characters' emotional healing journeys are intertwined with societal struggles over redefining collective and personal identities. The paper will also compare the trauma narratives from different cultural and religious perspectives, particularly examining how the Muslim-American experience in *The Submission* and the Jewish-American experience in *The Writing on the Wall* highlight distinct ways trauma is processed in a post-9/11 context. Through these objectives, the research aims to expand the understanding of post-9/11 trauma literature by offering insights into how literature can serve as a medium for articulating the inexpressible emotional scars left by national disasters.

This research employs a literary application methodology that involves a detailed examination of the themes, narrative structures, and character development within Amy Waldman's *The Submission* and Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* in relation to trauma theory. The study aims to explore how these two novels represent the psychological aftermath of the September 11th attacks, focusing specifically on the emotional trauma experienced by individuals and communities, and the process of recovery.

The primary approach to this analysis is close reading, where specific sections of both novels will be examined to identify how trauma is depicted through the characters' emotional journeys and their relationships with their environments. The study will look at how Waldman and Schwartz employ narrative fragmentation, shifts in perspective, and fragmented memory to reflect the fractured experience





of trauma. These narrative techniques will be analysed through the lens of trauma theory to understand how the emotional scars left by 9/11 are conveyed and processed in the novels.

An important element of this research is the application of trauma theory, with a specific focus on scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, and Ruth Leys. These theorists offer valuable frameworks for analysing the disruption of memory and the challenges of representing trauma. Caruth's concept of "unclaimed experience" (Caruth 4), which asserts that trauma cannot be fully integrated into consciousness or memory, will be applied to examine how characters in both novels struggle to comprehend their experiences. LaCapra's emphasis on the "working through" of trauma (LaCapra 57) will be instrumental in analysing how characters attempt to heal and move beyond their traumatic experiences, often revisiting the pain as part of their recovery. Additionally, Ruth Leys' critique on the limits of language in conveying trauma (Leys 129) will help illuminate how both authors depict the difficulty of expressing the emotional aftermath of 9/11.

The methodology will also incorporate comparative analysis to investigate how the novels represent trauma from divergent cultural and religious perspectives. By comparing the Muslim-American experience in Waldman's *The Submission* with the Jewish-American experience in Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall*, this paper will examine how these communities process trauma in different ways, considering their cultural and religious identities and the societal divisions that shape their post-9/11 experiences.

The thematic analysis will focus on key themes such as memory, identity, and loss, identifying how these themes are used by the authors to explore the emotional and psychological effects of trauma. The study will analyse how these themes interact with one another in both novels and how they shape the characters' identities and relationships. Finally, the narrative technique will be explored, with particular attention paid to the authors' use of fragmented storytelling, shifts in perspective, and silences in the narrative to reflect the traumatic impact of 9/11 and the limitations of language in fully expressing such deep emotional wounds.

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in trauma theory, with an emphasis on the works of Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, and Ruth Leys. These scholars provide essential insights into the psychological and narrative dimensions of trauma and will inform the analysis of how Waldman and Schwartz depict the emotional aftermath of 9/11.





In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth explores the concept of trauma as an experience that cannot be fully processed or articulated (Caruth 4). This idea will be used to analyse how both novels depict the inarticulable nature of trauma, especially in the characters' struggles to remember or speak about their traumatic experiences. LaCapra's concept of "working through" trauma, as discussed in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, emphasizes the ongoing process of confronting and reinterpreting trauma rather than attempting to fully overcome it (LaCapra 57). This theoretical framework will guide the examination of the characters' attempts to come to terms with their post-9/11 experiences and their emotional healing. In *The Anatomy of Trauma*, Leys critiques the narrative and linguistic representation of trauma, arguing that trauma resists easy articulation and is often ineffable (Leys 129). This will provide a lens for analysing how Waldman and Schwartz use narrative fragmentation and silences to express the limitations of language when dealing with traumatic experiences.

Laub's work on the role of testimony and witnessing in trauma (Laub 57) will be used to understand how characters in the novels testify to their trauma, and how this act of sharing or not sharing their experiences shapes their recovery. Cooke's work on trauma and memory in post-9/11 literature will aid in understanding how the novels negotiate the interplay of personal memory and collective cultural memory in the wake of the attacks (Cooke 106). Bernard's insights into the cultural and political dimensions of post-9/11 literature will be used to explore how *The Submission* and *The Writing on the Wall* engage with themes of identity and societal divisions in the context of trauma (Bernard 124).

The application of trauma theory to Amy Waldman's *The Submission* and Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* reveals how both authors illustrate the psychological trauma caused by the September 11th attacks, emphasizing the emotional scars left on individuals and communities. Through the frameworks provided by critics such as Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Ruth Leys, and others, this paper aims to demonstrate how Waldman and Schwartz address themes of memory, identity, and the limits of language in representing trauma. By analysing key elements from both novels, this application will support the research's objectives by showing how the texts engage with the complexities of trauma, recovery, and the representation of loss and healing.

In line with Cathy Caruth's concept of unclaimed experience (Caruth 4), both Waldman and Schwartz explore how trauma resists coherent narrative. Caruth argues that trauma often "cannot be integrated into consciousness" (Caruth 4) because it disrupts the natural flow of memory. This is



particularly evident in *The Submission*, where the protagonist, Mohammad Khan, a Muslim architect, is chosen to design a memorial for the victims of 9/11. The narrative structure of Waldman's novel is fragmented, moving between various perspectives that showcase the psychological scars of the event and its aftermath. The characters' disjointed recollections and experiences of the attacks reflect Caruth's idea that trauma is often experienced as something that "erupts" rather than being recalled in a linear, coherent manner.

For example, Mohammad's difficulty in processing the racial and cultural assumptions placed upon him after the memorial submission reflects the disruptive force of trauma. His internal turmoil and fragmented responses to the external events around him show the shattered nature of memory and how individuals struggle to understand their lived experiences post-trauma. Caruth's theory is substantiated here as Mohammad's trauma is not easily integrated into a single, unified narrative. Instead, his story unfolds through multiple perspectives, reflecting the chaotic and fragmented nature of trauma's effect on the mind.

Similarly, in *The Writing on the Wall*, Schwartz portrays the aftermath of 9/11 through the eyes of multiple characters, often using fragmented, nonlinear storytelling to reflect the disorienting experience of trauma. The main character, Naomi, is haunted by her memory of the attacks and the loss of a loved one, but her recollections are distorted and incomplete. Schwartz uses gaps in the narrative to reflect Naomi's psychological state and the challenge of recounting the horrors of trauma. This aligns with Caruth's assertion that trauma "refuses to be put into words" (Caruth 7), as Naomi's inability to narrate her feelings highlights the inherent difficulty of articulating trauma.

Dominick LaCapra's notion of "working through" trauma emphasises that trauma is not something that can be simply "overcome" but rather an ongoing process of confronting and reinterpreting the traumatic event (LaCapra 57). This is particularly evident in both novels, where characters attempt to rebuild their lives and identities after 9/11.

In *The Submission*, Mohammad Khan's journey of healing is intertwined with the public debate over the memorial. His personal trauma becomes entangled with the broader societal trauma, as he is forced to confront his identity as a Muslim-American in the face of a nation's collective grief. LaCapra's concept of "working through" can be seen in Mohammad's repeated attempts to address his trauma, particularly in his interactions with the public and his struggle to gain acceptance. Waldman's portrayal



of his character encapsulates the difficulty of confronting past trauma while navigating the complex web of personal and societal identity.

For example, in a scene where Mohammad reflects on his own cultural identity in the wake of public backlash, he is unable to reconcile his personal pain with the hostile, judgmental environment around him. This echoes LaCapra's idea of the "continuing process" of working through trauma, where healing is not linear but instead involves multiple stages of confrontation and reinterpretation (LaCapra 57). Mohammad's emotional journey in *The Submission* is thus a representation of trauma as a process that requires both personal introspection and engagement with the larger societal narrative.

Similarly, in *The Writing on the Wall*, Naomi's emotional healing follows a similar path. Schwartz's portrayal of Naomi's introspective journey emphasises how individuals must work through their trauma by reconstructing their identity in the aftermath of loss. Naomi's therapy sessions, her emotional connections with others, and her interactions with the world around her all reflect LaCapra's idea that trauma is a process of coming to terms with the past in an ongoing manner. Naomi's struggle to heal, though never fully resolved, reflects the long-term nature of trauma and its impact on her ability to reintegrate into society.

Ruth Leys' critique of trauma literature in *The Anatomy of Trauma* focuses on how language fails to fully represent the depth of trauma. She argues that trauma is inherently ineffable and that the "gap between what can be said and what remains unsaid" is central to the representation of trauma (Leys 129). Both Waldman and Schwartz utilise narrative techniques that highlight these limits of language, reflecting the characters' struggles to articulate their suffering.

In *The Submission*, Waldman underscores the limits of language through the character of Mohammad Khan, whose silence often speaks louder than words. For instance, when Mohammad is confronted by the public's outcry about the selection of a Muslim architect for the memorial, his response is marked by silence and withdrawal. This silence is a powerful expression of the limitations of language in the face of overwhelming grief and anger. Waldman's use of Mohammad's silence exemplifies Leys' argument that trauma cannot be fully articulated through language but instead often emerges through what is unsaid and unspoken (Leys 129).

Similarly, in *The Writing on the Wall*, Schwartz portrays the limitations of language through Naomi's fragmented inner monologue and her inability to express the full extent of her grief. Naomi's



therapy sessions, where she struggles to articulate her emotions, reflect Leys' argument that trauma cannot be neatly captured by language. The disjointed structure of the narrative and Naomi's struggle to communicate her pain underscore the ineffability of trauma and its resistance to verbal expression. This aligns with Leys' assertion that trauma often exists in a state of unsay ability (Leys 129), as Naomi's narrative voice becomes fragmented, mirroring her inability to reconcile her inner turmoil with external language.

The comparative aspect of this study, examining the Muslim-American experience in *The Submission* and the Jewish-American experience in *The Writing on the Wall*, highlights the different ways cultural and religious identities influence the processing of trauma. This analysis draws on the work of critics like Miriam Cooke, who discusses the intersection of memory and identity in post-9/11 literature (Cooke 106). The novels reflect how trauma is not only a personal experience but also shaped by cultural and religious factors.

In *The Submission*, Mohammad's experience is heavily influenced by his Muslim-American identity, which is placed under intense scrutiny in the aftermath of 9/11. His trauma is compounded by the societal divisions that label him as "other" and perpetuate prejudice against him. This cultural context shapes his emotional journey and reflects Cooke's argument that post-9/11 literature often highlights the clash between personal memory and public identity (Cooke 106). The societal forces acting upon Mohammad complicate his healing process, as he must navigate both personal grief and cultural stigmatisation.

In contrast, in *The Writing on the Wall*, Naomi's Jewish-American identity influences her response to trauma. Schwartz's depiction of Naomi's struggles highlights the ways in which cultural narratives about grief and loss inform personal experiences of trauma. Naomi's interactions with her community and the sense of displacement she feels in a post-9/11 world reflect Cooke's notion that cultural identity profoundly impacts how trauma is understood and experienced (Cooke 106).

By applying trauma theory and integrating the perspectives of key critics such as Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Ruth Leys, and Miriam Cooke, this paper demonstrates how *The Submission* and *The Writing on the Wall* engage with the psychological trauma of 9/11. Both novels use fragmented narrative techniques, explore the limitations of language, and emphasise the cultural dimensions of trauma to reflect the complexities of emotional healing and identity reconstruction in the aftermath of a



national catastrophe. Through these literary devices, Waldman and Schwartz contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the representation of trauma and recovery in post-9/11 literature.

As this research has unfolded, it has become increasingly evident that the works of Amy Waldman and Lynne Sharon Schwartz grapple with the immense, often inexpressible, psychological trauma inflicted by the September 11th attacks. This trauma, as demonstrated through the application of trauma theory, is not something that can be easily understood or healed, but rather something that constantly reshapes the individual and collective psyche. In both *The Submission* and *The Writing on the Wall*, the novels reach their emotional climax when the characters, in their struggles to heal, come face to face with the limits of their own ability to process and express the horror of the tragedy.

Waldman's *The Submission* reaches its emotional peak when Mohammad Khan, after experiencing intense public backlash and personal disillusionment, is forced to confront the suffocating weight of his trauma. His silence, a central motif in the novel, reflects the ineffability of his grief. Mohammad's inability to verbally articulate the depths of his emotional pain encapsulates Ruth Leys' concept of trauma's unsayability. His trauma is too vast to be fully contained within the confines of language, and this silence is, in a sense, the only way he can resist the reductive narratives imposed on him by society. This silence does not equate to a resolution of trauma but rather underscores the perpetual struggle for emotional reconciliation. His journey, instead of leading to closure, demonstrates the enduring nature of trauma—an experience that can neither be neatly processed nor fully overcome.

Similarly, Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* reaches its own emotional climax when Naomi, having spent much of the novel struggling to reconnect with her fragmented memories and emotions, faces the harrowing realisation that the true nature of her grief cannot be fully known, even to herself. In one of the novel's final moments, Naomi finds herself in a therapy session where she tries, yet again, to make sense of the loss of her loved one in the 9/11 attacks. The scene is marked by an intense moment of unspoken grief, where Naomi's therapy session remains suspended in silence. Schwartz's writing here powerfully encapsulates Leys' claim that trauma exceeds the capacity of language to represent, creating a gap that cannot be filled with words. Naomi's recognition that she may never find a way to articulate her pain is both devastating and deeply poignant—it signifies the tragic truth that some wounds, especially those inflicted by such a collective catastrophe, cannot be fully healed or expressed.

Both novels reach their respective climaxes by illustrating the perpetual cycle of confronting trauma—acknowledging its presence yet recognising the impossibility of fully resolving or expressing



it. The characters' journeys highlight the fragmented nature of trauma, as theorised by Cathy Caruth, where the traumatic experience, despite being constantly revisited, never truly integrates into the individual's coherent memory. Caruth's assertion that trauma is experienced as an eruption rather than a straightforward memory is fully realised in both texts. Waldman and Schwartz's protagonists do not gain a complete understanding of their suffering, nor do they reach a clear resolution or emotional closure. Instead, the trauma remains an inescapable part of their identities, ever-present and ever-shifting.

In this climax, both novels echo Dominick LaCapra's theory of "working through" trauma. The climax is not an end but a moment of recognition that trauma is a process that can never be fully worked through or "overcome." It is something that must continually be engaged with, revisited, and wrestled with throughout one's life. For Mohammad and Naomi, their trauma is not something that can be neatly resolved through linear healing or closure. Instead, it transforms into a permanent part of their being, one that they must acknowledge and live with, but never entirely assimilate.

Thus, the climax of both texts—the ultimate realisation of trauma's inexpressibility and its persistent presence—emerges as a critical point in the broader understanding of 9/11 trauma. The novels refuse to offer the comfort of closure, demonstrating that trauma cannot be fully understood or healed. The characters' struggles with this fact underscore the novelists' attempts to articulate the inarticulable, representing the deepest wounds of the September 11th attacks in a way that language, narrative, and memory can only begin to approach but never fully capture. In doing so, *The Submission* and *The Writing on the Wall* stand as poignant testaments to the power of literature to explore and reflect the limits of human expression in the face of overwhelming tragedy.

In conclusion, the application of trauma theory to *The Submission* and *The Writing on the Wall* reveals that both novels address the enduring emotional and psychological scars of the September 11th attacks with depth and sensitivity. Waldman and Schwartz's works demonstrate that trauma is not something that can be neatly resolved or expressed, but rather an ongoing process of confronting and living with the remnants of a collective catastrophe. Through their characters' fragmented memories, silences, and continual struggles to reconstruct their identities, both novels illustrate the complexities of trauma and healing. In doing so, these works contribute significantly to the conversation about the long-term psychological effects of 9/11 and the role of literature in representing the ineffable experiences of loss, fragmentation, and emotional recovery. The climax of both narratives, marked by the recognition



of the limits of language and the perpetual presence of trauma, invites readers to confront the unresolvable nature of grief and the painful but necessary process of living with its aftermath.

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