

TRANSCENDING TIME AND SPACE: TRAUMA NARRATION IN *THE HARMONY SILK FACTORY*

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ABSTRACT

Tash Aw is the first renowned Malaysian writer who has brought Malaysian literature to the platform of the world. This paper uses the text, *The Harmony Silk Factory* (2005), by Tash Aw to investigate the relationships between traumatic memory and temporal-spatial narratives. The text utilises three narrators to tell the story of central silent character Johnny Lim, intermixing with their personal memories. We hypothesises that traumatic memories are correspondent to or characterised with special time and space arrangement of narratives. The article also frames its arguments according to the ideas proposed by Michael Toolan and Cathy Caruth, Toolan's viewpoints about time and space in discourse and story; Caruth's views on features of trauma. The frame of argument presupposed that circular temporal-spatial narratives have more similarities to traumatic memories than previously assumed. By analysing Jasper's and Peter's telling of Johnny's experiences, the study strives to deepen the idea of chronotope arrangement being conducive to expression of traumas. The study concludes that traumas determine special arrangement of narratives, especially in the dimension of time and space, in turn, temporal-spatial narratives are to express traumas' characteristics and even achieve some universal theme in literary works. The implication of the study allows us to view traumatic texts more objectively and deeply.

Keywords: memory; narrative; space; time; trauma.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Einstein's concept, our universe is composed of time and space. The relationship between time and space is that in the structure of space, there is an additional time axis beyond the three axes of length, width and height of ordinary three-dimensional space. There is an updated conception that all dimensions are composed of time. Why can one kind of time form different dimensional spaces? The first is the indivisibility of time and space. Without time, there is no space, including the most basic one-dimensional space, because space-time itself is an indivisible whole. It is meaningless to talk about time without space, or talk about space without time. The second point is the diversity of time. In daily life, what we are exposed to is the composition of time, that is, a total time system formed by the organic combination of various sub-times. Take exercise as an example, what we observe is generally a combination of several different movements, that is, a combined movement. As for exercise time, we can again regard it as the time of up and down movement, the time of left and right movement, and the time of back-and-forth movement. Of course, the division methods are diverse, which constitutes the diversity of time. As for how to divide, it depends on different situations. Time corresponds to space and plays a decisive role. This genre of time and place is called story time and space if mentioned in literary works. Story is the raw materials of works, which means the events happening one by one, so story time is based on chronological order and it bears the linear feature and cannot be changed.

On the basis of narratology, there is another important key term: discourse time. Discourse is also called plot, which is the recreation of story by writers, so it can be rearranged and reconstructed by subjective perspectives. Every novel has its own unique clock, because the clock can be made forward "prolepses" (Toolan 50) or backward "analepses" (Toolan 50) and certainly normal linear chronological order. The special modification of time sequence is somewhat related to the topic, theme, ideology or subconsciousness, or even something hidden, for example, emotional tension or trauma. Similar to discourse time, the settings are symbolic or at least are embodied with certain meanings. They are like huge containers to embody everything, such as characters, actions, conversations, feelings, emotions and even psychological disorders like trauma. For trauma, Cathy Caruth believes that it as "breach" (4) or an opening in mind, so "it is not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again" (4) maybe as the form of nightmares and flashbacks. And then she introduces features of trauma, which is "double wound" (3) belatedness, and "double telling" (7), a kind of narrative between "crisis of life" (7) and "crisis of death" (7). It is a double torture both to existence and destruction. The features of traumas or traumatic memories determine the unique treatment in literary works. Story time and space cannot easily show the mimesis of traumatic reactions, because Caruth holds that trauma has the feature of unspeakability, victims cannot comprehend or figure out what has happened in story time and space; however, Michelle Balaev states that trauma can be relieved or even cured through narratives or telling out to others in order to put traumatic experiences in the victims' consciousness gradually and understand and finally accept them, therefore discourse time and space may play the role of healing.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the inter-relationship between traumatic memory and temporal-spatial narratives by analysing the novel *The Harmony Silk Factory* (2005) by Tash Aw. It seeks to nullify the idea of traumatic memory's belatedness and flashbacks correspond to circular time and space narration by drawing on Tash Aw's manipulation of the narrative technique and themes in the novel. The paper hypothesises that this circular mode of narration advocates the healing process of trauma or at least the will of healing. *The Harmony*

Silk Factory draws on temporal-spatial arrangement using traumatic memories. “The multiple narrative technique allows the writer to project personal and non-personal perspective of narrators in fiction thereby providing different interpretations of the same character and events” (Janoo 188). The Chinese businessman Johnny, is given three versions from three different narrators. To his son Jasper, Johnny is a monster, because of murdering his first patron, Tiger Tan, to get his textile business and replacing his father-in-law as the valley’s chief power-broker by injuring him in a fire he set himself, and even in 1942, betraying his fellow commanders, who were then massacred by the occupying Japanese. To Jasper’s mother, Snow, who died giving birth to him, Johnny is alien and unknowable and keeps a certain distance with her, which is the pain in her heart. To Johnny’s friend, Peter, Johnny is an innocent child who worried that he will lose Snow to Peter’s superior charms. Peter himself is far from innocent, a bitter, poisonous man who will indeed betray Johnny. Johnny is the main cause of traumatic memories of Jasper and Snow, while he has the link of friendship to Peter because they share the similar trauma of violent treatment in childhood.

Traumas in literacy are created by discourse, but in fact traumas are lack of language, because they are out of normal consciousness or understanding, so language cannot express them precisely, which means language creates traumas which cannot be expressed. Therefore, the narrative of trauma is correspondingly limited and special to show its characteristics which cannot “encompass the overwhelming nature of traumatic experiences” (Natasha, 5). There is not much research on the systematic study of narrative features of traumatic memory in the aspects of time and space and finally reach a mode of circular time and space narration to heal trauma.

RESEARCH METHODS

No matter what kind of novel it is, and what the content is, stories must happen in two dimensions—time and space, which are like a large container to obtain everything in it, including characters, actions, emotions, psychological activities, perspectives, conversations and certainly trauma. Traumatic memories are connected with specific time and space in which traumas happen in real life and are also related to the particular time and space which trigger them being recalled in the aspect of story time and the uncommon arrangement or combination of the two pairs of them sometimes exist in literary works to form the text time which is a way writers imitate or highlight the features of traumatic memories.

Traditionally, time and space are analysed separately in literary works. Time and space in texts are always structured and measured, because they cannot be experienced as the factual daily state or changes of state. However, they rely on our conceptual recognition of establishment of Newtonian-Euclidean paradigm of linear sequence, the full cycle of the sun’s movement from the east to the west and the stereotypical background or landscape we live/see in daily life. Time/Space in story or story time/space is our pre-understanding or basis of comprehension which is correspondent to the homogeneous, uniform, three-dimensional spatiality and linear chronological temporality. Whereas, the text time or discourse time is the rearrangement, recreation or reworking of story time. Time order can be disorganised and then redesigned, like a deck of poker, the original sequence from the smallest 3 to the largest King being mixed together without hierarchy: “[b]ecause text time is inescapably linear, there is an obvious and immediate disruption of any neat correlation of real time to text time as soon as the narrative involves more than one set of developing circumstances affecting different sets of character.” (Toolan 49). Special arrangement of time may be embodiment of underlying

psychological cultural or thematic meanings. Sometimes writers do not expand the narrative in a linear order, but intertwines the past and the present to form a circular form. In story time, time can only appear in a linear state presented in sequential order. However, in discourse time, the narrator can arbitrarily move the progress of the clock, fast or slow, forward or backward, at the same speed (scene), or even time disappears (pause) or jumps (pre-narration). A set of circular time can be formed by analepsis and prolepsis.

Similarly, the spatial narratives or settings in literary works not only refer to the physical space, but also includes the protagonists' and even the writer's psychological space. To some extent, physical space has some characteristics of mental space. There is close relationship between spatial narrative and traumas of characters. The physical space displacement of the protagonists in fictions, plays a role in embodying the psychological space, and can deeply reflect the characteristics of mentality. In addition, "setting here may be much more than backcloth, it may be instrumental—like another character—in leading a character to act in a certain way" (Toolan 103). This analogical function has a long history in literature: "[t]he fuller role for setting—quasi-animate, menacing or soothing, chorus-like or emblematic—goes back in the English novel at least as far as Dickens, and continued to develop and modulate in the work of George Eliot, Hardy, Lawrence, and many others. In American fiction it seems to have been prominent from the earliest literary writings: in Cooper's Leatherstocking novels, in Poe copiously (most memorable, perhaps, in 'The Fall of the House of Usher'), in the Gothic tradition that descended through Hawthorne to Faulkner, in Twain (what would Huckleberry Finn be without the raft and the river?), and so on" (Toolan 104).

In fact, memory is a form of combination of two sets of time and space. The time and place in which happens the recalling and the recalling about the time and space, so that memory, it self, is the juxtaposition of present and past. A special memory, traumatic memories, is introduced in Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* which offers its causes and features. She pointed out that Freud, in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, has stated the reasons as "the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the crowd—is not like the wound of body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that... is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (4). The catastrophic events may refer to natural disaster, rape, child abuse and other violent concurrences, to which the responses have been understood as PTSD. These events are too overwhelming and too sudden, humans do not have time to accept and understand what is happening. Human consciousness tries to figure out the events after the traumatic experiences, so the images of the events will come back repetitively as traumatic memories in the forms of nightmares, flashbacks and illuminations "so trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). This is the first direct cause. However, humans like other animals have the self-protection mechanism. When they confront disastrous events endangering their or other people's lives, they will try to escape such impact, pain or hurt, so both their body and mind will be in a state of numbness: "[t]he story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life" (7). So traumatic memories is a kind of "double telling" to be a link between the death of victims and

the life of survivors. However, the American Psychiatric Association and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders suggests a new category of aftermath of trauma which is called DESNOS². Therefore, memory is only a form of reaction or protection, there are other ways to escape or rescue from trauma. The features of traumatic memories are belatedness, repetition, and circular sequence of time: “[t]he historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. And it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness” (17). In fact, these features of memories will bring serious impact on humans. The repetition will make victims suffer from traumas over and over again. The belatedness will bring uncertain time of risks and distortion of events and the circular temporal structure will bring a black hole of time, in which victims can hardly escape from the monstrous control of it.

Trauma narratives employ various narrative strategies, including “landscape imagery, temporal fissures, silence, ... narrative omission..., nonlinear plot or disruptive temporal sequences” to depict the victim's confusion (Balaev 159), all of which serve to fragment the narrative. While Caruth and her followers prioritise the trauma victim's state of confusion, seeing it as evidence of her unmendable shattered psyche, Forter emphasises the victim's task of re-formulating a new identity in the wake of trauma's devastating effects. Through retrodetermining her earlier, traumatogenic event through the lens of the later event, the victim transforms unknowing into knowing and can then act on this new knowledge of herself and her relationship to external reality.

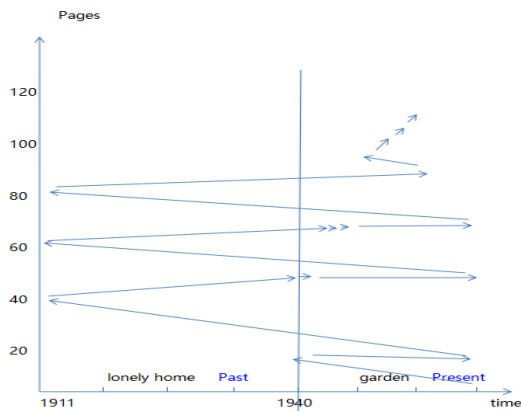
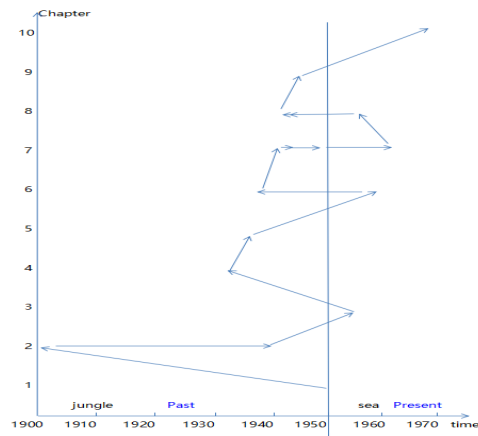
Trauma theory and form of temporal-spatial narrative work hand in hand in the novel *The Harmony Silk Factory*. We may find some reasonable modes of narratives in it to relieve the negative impacts of traumas towards characters in the novel and states functions of remembrance and forgetfulness through the narratives of memories.

Trauma Narration in *The Harmony Silk Factory*

Tash Aw is one of the famous novelists among Joseph Conrad to Anthony Burgess, who give us a picture of Malaysia. As the title indicates, the story happens around a textile shop in the Kinda Valley which is near to the Straits of Malacca. The texts use three focalisers to narrate the story of the protagonist Johnny Lim, his son Jasper, wife Snow and best friend Peter. The first narrator Jasper tells the story of Lim Seng Chin, a.k.a. Johnny Lim, raising from a young poor coolie to a wealthy cloth merchant and powerful politician. Jasper's telling is mainly based on linear time order, but inserted with his own experiences nearly every other chapter. Due to his nonparticipant in his father's early life, he obtained Johnny's story according to books or newspapers in libraries. The narration of time and space is as in Diagram 1 showed to us like a zigzag shape.

Diagram 1 Jasper's Narration

Diagram 2 Peter's Narration



Jasper believes that it is his father who brings death to his mother Snow. The loss of mother tortures him and it is the direct reason of distant relationship or even hatred toward his father Johnny. One period of Jasper's own experience is followed by a certain span of the past events of Johnny. In the first chapter, when Jasper was only a boy, he observed Johnny's transaction with foreign guests, which is the division line to separate the two mingling Jasper's (present and sea) and Johnny's (past and jungle) experiences or periods of time. In chapter 2, Jasper swam with Johnny in the sea, and he also went to swimming in Remios after his father's funeral in the last chapter of his narrative: "I swam far out from the shore, floating calmly in the blue-green water." It presents a cycle, returning to the beginning.

The shape of time order in Diagram 1 is quite similar to Peter's narrative. But Jasper's knowledge with Johnny is mixed with the records of Johnny's early life. There are subjective understanding and somewhat historical narratives. It is likely that the subjective emotions are quite objective to the facts, because they are what Jasper encountered by, while the objective narratives are maybe fictional and imaginative, as people cannot experience them again, nobody knows what exactly has happened in that period, which is quite paradoxical. However, from the Diagram 2 (Peter's narrative), we can find that Peter is swaying from now garden (new Eden) to the past home Hemscott (trauma, Hell). The experiences his participating with Johnny's life is depicted step by step mainly in chronological order between now and past. This arrangement does not only enhance the difficulty of reading the novel, but also, more importantly, to show the complexity of Peter's mind. Even when he is old, and nearly dead, he cannot get rid of the torture of losing his father, the indifference of his mother, and the violence made to him by Brother Anthony. His fleeing to Malaya is to escape from the familiar

emotionally remote home and try to find a new life; “That night I knew my life was about to change. For many years afterwards, I relived the quivering, insistent sensations of that particular storm-washed evening, and wandered if I had merely imagined it all” (Aw 254).

Trauma may bring aphasia, as it is “an assimilated event that shatters identity and remains outside normal memory and narrative representation” (<https://literariness.org>). Freud’s later work on trauma, particularly the “theory of compulsive repetition” (Forster 269), departs from his earlier concept of *Nachtraglichkeit*. While *Nachtraglichkeit*’s “temporal logic” unfolds in time (Forster 264), the trauma victim’s compulsion to repeat the trauma in dreams “has the effect of homogenizing and dehistoricizing the experience of time itself (Forster 269). Nonetheless, applying *Nachtraglichkeit* as both “delayed action” and “retrotermination” is possible for many trauma narratives, since traumatised characters can demonstrate through their actions that they now conceptualise the earlier event in a new and often startling way.

The retrospective outlook of retrotermination in trauma narratives, as a character re-defines the meaning of an earlier event by what has happened after it, counters traditional narrative’s forward-looking perspective, which depends on meaning to unfold in sequential (forward-moving) time. Furthermore, the trauma narrative character’s cognitive process of retrotermination provides a good analogy for what the spatial form narrative reader must do: instead of relying on a forward-moving plot to carry the narrative’s meaning, the reader must hold multiple plot events, themes, and motifs in mental suspension, weighing them against each other, until he can form meaning from their relationships. One inadvertent consequence of defining *Nachtraglichkeit* as retrotermination is that once a character retroterminates his/her trauma event, often the unknowing nature of trauma disappears to some degree. The character has “worked out” the meaning of her trauma and sees herself and her environment in a new light, for better or worse (Gemmen 24).

Extending of Plot into Present and Future—Jasper as an Example

Jasper’s narratives are based on the mingling of his memories of Johnny and historical materials of “books, official records, memoirs” (Aw 113). The plot begins at the punishment made to him by Johnny, when he was just a boy. He wanted to tell Johnny the beautiful woman smiling at him when she departing with the Thai General who makes illegal trade with Johnny. Jasper has become used to his father’s punishment. “His response was I expected. He reached slowly for my ear and twisted it hard, squeezing the blood from it. He said, ‘Don’t tell stories,’ and then slapped my face twice” (Aw 5). Obviously, Jasper is often treated violently by Johnny. There is little communication between the son and father. Even though Jasper knows the outcome of talking with his father, he dares to say something disgusting to Johnny, in order to trigger the attention from him. Such trauma of domestic violence is deeply embedded in his heart and he cannot make sense of it, so that he wants to experience it again and again to ensure the existence of himself. That is the repetition of trauma.

Jasper views the Johnny story as the paradigm for his life, telling his story ultimately does not enable him to locate his meaning in the paradigm because he was only a useless being; “For more than a few years of my useless life, I have devoted myself to this enterprise, sitting in libraries and government offices even. My diligence has been surprising. I will admit that I have never been a scholar, but recent times have shown that I am capable of rational, organized study, in spite of my father’s belief that I would always be a dreamer and a wastrel” (Aw 6). Once he transforms Johnny Lim into a role model, he is able to claim the protagonist role in

the story. By taking action to complete the Johnny story, Jasper transforms himself from a trauma victim to a victimizer. "There is another reason why I now feel particularly well placed to relate the truth of my father's life... it is because the revelation of this truth has, in some strange way, brought me a measure of calm. I am not ashamed to admit that I have searched for this all my life. Now, at least, I know the truth and I am no longer angry. In fact, I am at peace" (Aw 6).

In his mind, Johnny is similar to "a liar, a cheat, a traitor and a skirt-chaser (Aw 4)". He decides to work out all of Johnny's evils, so, after all these discoveries, he is no longer angry, but at peace. Johnny not only beats Jasper, but also insults him by using words. Jasper has little emotional link with him, and even does not care about him. This is quite contradictory to the response of punishment. On the one hand, Jasper desires to be closer to his father, on the other hand, he hates him much in heart and wants to discover all of his bad-doings. After that, in the second chapter, Jasper tells about Johnny's origin southern part of China. Out of poverty and misery, Johnny's grandparents have to make a living in Malaysia. Jasper's icy skin is quite different from Johnny's, whose is brown. He has the look of a Japanese prince, which is also the division from his father. When talking about the name Johnny, he contrasts himself to Johnny. "Johnny Lim: short, squat, uncommunicative, a hopelessly bald loner with poor social skills..... My features, as I have already mentioned, are angular, my nose strangely large and sharp. On a good day some people even consider me handsome" (Aw 9). After introduction of Johnny's origin, Jasper narrates swimming in the sea with his father. He likes it very much, and only in these circumstances, his skin has no difference with Johnny's. "The sea was deep green, the colour of old, dark jade. That was the first time I ever noticed my skin, the colour of it. Not brown, not yellow, not white, not anything against the rich and mysterious green of the water around me" (Aw 17). He feels the happiness with Johnny, and asks him whether go swimming again and see the islands around. But Johnny is angry and refuses the request at once. "I hate islands. I don't like the sea much" (Aw 18). This incident happens when Jasper is twelve years old. When refused, he notices his "skin was white compared to his. It refused to turn dark, remaining pale and unblemished, a clean sheet beside his dirty sun-mottled arms" (Aw 18). The color of skin symbolises their gap of communication. Jasper cares about his skin; "the absence of light made my skin look less pale" (Aw 20). Jasper goes on telling his father's killing a British man and the murder of Tiger (the original owner of Harmony Silk Factory), but intertwined in his own traumatic experiences. When he is 18, he wants to leave home. In the station, his father talks about the word paradise meaning garden. Jasper begins to doubt about his harsh judgement to Johnny. But this thought disappears quickly as soon as Johnny's cold and hard voice of "Bastard", when a mosquito flies on his neck. The hatred and dislike come back. "My father was born with an illness, something that had eaten to the core of him; it had infected him forever, erasing all that was good inside him" (Aw 57). Then, Jasper mentions the story of Johnny and Snow. However, he is interrupted when visiting her mother's home when he is an adult. He produces illumination of entering into the embrace of his mother. Like a baby, he sucks the milk of Snow. But happiness does not last long, because traumatic memory enters into his mind. He remembers Johnny who does harm to his mother. In the imagination, his mother puts a pistol in his hand. "Shoot him she says shoot him for all the things he has done" (Aw 88). In the following chapters, Jasper narrates Johnny's murder of his father-in-law, and betrayal of all the Communists, which leads to their death. Finally, there is the funeral of Johnny. He goes to the sea, where has not been for many years; "I swam far out

from the shore, floating calmly in the blue-green water” (Tash 119). It is like a cycle; the narration begins with swimming in the sea, and ends at the same scene.

He feels peaceful and calm after narration of his father’s life especially all of his wrongdoings. Normally, father is the example of son who has close emotional link with him. Jasper wants to be close to Johnny when he is a boy. But Johnny treats Jasper violently and indifferently, which is Jasper’s traumatic memory. He cannot understand it by using the consciousness; “Under extreme conditions, existing meaning schemes may be entirely unable to accommodate frightening experiences, which causes the memory of these experiences to be stored differently and not be available for retrieval under ordinary conditions: it becomes dissociated from conscious awareness and voluntary control” (Caruth 160). He ventures to talk with Johnny, knowing he will receive punishment, because he wants to experience it again and try to put it into his narrative memory and understand it, which is applicable to the trauma theory that “patients needed to be brought back to the state in which the memory was first laid down in order to create a condition in which the dissociated memory of the past could be integrated into current meaning schemes” (Caruth 175). It coincides with Johnny’s sayings like “Death erases all traces, all memories of lives that once existed, completely and forever” (Aw 4). That is more reasonable explanation is that there is no trauma again, because Jasper transfers the traumatic memory into his narrative memory:

Traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language. It appears that, in order for this to occur successfully, the traumatized person has to return to the memory often in order to complete it. ... In the case of complete recovery, the person does not suffer anymore from the reappearance of traumatic memories in the form of flashbacks, behavioral reenactments, and so on. Instead, the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened; he has given it a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality. (Caruth 176)

Because of the hurt made by Johnny, Jasper cannot use unbiased words to tell his father’s story, but by many negative words and sentences to make his judgement. At the very beginning, he says that “Of all the bad things he ever did, the worst happened long before the big cars, pretty women and the Harmony Silk Factory” (Aw 5). He believes that he has “conducted a clear and complete picture of the events surrounding my father’s terrible past” (Aw 6). But he also admits that “the retelling of history can never be perfect, especially when the piecing together of the story has been done by a person with as modest an intellect as myself” (Aw 6). This is also evident in “Some people are born with a streak of malice running through them. It poisons their blood forever, swimming in their veins like a mysterious virus. It may lurk unnoticed for many years, surfacing only occasionally. Good times may temporarily suppress these instincts, and the person may even appear well intentioned and honest. Sooner or later, however, the cold hatred wins over. It is an incurable condition. I can pinpoint the exact moment when I knew for certain that my father was afflicted with this terrible disease” (Aw 56). Jasper even hates his grandparents TK and Patti Soong; “They exist only as ghosts, shapeless shadowy imprints on my consciousness. I would not have loved them even if I had known them, because when the debits and the credits have been weighed, TK and Patti fall on the wrong side of the line between good and evil. It was their desire for Snow, my mother, to marry a rich man that pushed her into the arms of Johnny. Nothing can ever atone for that” (Aw 70).

When Jasper is young, he cannot understand the reason of his father's isolation and domestic violence, gradually after he grows up, especially he has finished the narration of Johnny's true story, he can grasp what has happened to his childhood. His father is just an evil; there is no goodness in his heart. Therefore, it is natural for Johnny to perform violence and indifference to Jasper, because that is Johnny's personality. Snow becomes an image of angel; Jasper creates her characteristics by imagination, but in fact she is not as perfect as he imagines. Anyone who makes the marriage of Snow and Johnny should be blamed. The death of his mother and absence of his father are the origin of his traumatic feelings, which influences his thought and judgement towards people around him. It is father who has done wrong and brought misery to mother. Mother should be loved and have a happy life, while father is the one must be condemned.

Jasper is psychologically arrested, caught in a death-in-life traumatic existence, but at the same time he is dynamic and creative in narrating. He was confined in the past, but has the impulses to move forward in the temporal future, and through his narration, the past is mixed with the present, and the present reaches to the future, finally transcending time.

Bringing Meaning to Their Life—Peter as an Example

Except for time arrangement, writers may use place to symbolise the multiple meanings that trauma holds for the protagonist, demonstrating "the internal struggle of the self and the various workings of the mind as the individual attempts to understand, incorporate, and explain the traumatic event" (Balaev 161). In the trauma narrative, specific places are often connected with the traumatised characters' internal realities to assimilate with their external, cultural reality; the convergence of internal and external realities in this specific place allows her to order "memories, feelings, and meaning" (160), which results in the re-formulation of identity. Balaev proposes that spaces are often utilised as the place where the characters may "test the boundaries of the self against an external medium in order to experience what is self and non-self, and to differentiate between contemporary reality and traumatic past" (161). The trauma narrative writer's use of place as a narrative strategy serves both to establish place as a symbol for trauma's multiple meanings and to function as part of the characters' task of forming identity in the wake of trauma.

Space plays the role of occurring place of trauma and curing function of it. Two pairs of specific places are relevant to the Johnny story: the jungle and sea, home and garden. Switching from one to the other is the indication of the viewpoint and way of healing trauma. Peter narrates his current garden life, nursing home, and inserts with the past memories of the past of childhood and experiences with Johnny. At the very beginning of the narration, he talks about his plan and arrangement of the garden, where the old men living in. Its inspiration is from Oriental; "I confess that my borders are not entirely devoid of English undertones. Anyone can see that they are a subtle nod at Hemscott, my child home in Gloucestershire whose herbaceous borders were exemplary" (Aw 247). The garden makes him far away from his misery childhood. His father dies when he is only four years old. His mother always drunk with her younger lover. He is alone all the day. He has Nanny, but she always sits in her armchair in silence; "Another distinction Janet observed is that) traumatic memory is evoked under particular conditions. It occurs automatically in situations which are reminiscent of the original traumatic situation. These circumstances trigger the traumatic memory" (Caruth 163).

Peter also confesses that "Hemscott's influence on me has been stronger than I imagined I have only realized this of late. All my life I wanted to escape it but now I find it is

still with me, the only thing I have left” (Aw 247). Hemscott’s influence is so great that he tries to leave his home town and start a new life, but he cannot get rid of it in his mind. That is the reason his narration is inserted with the traumatic memories of his childhood, whenever there is the reminiscence in life of Malaysia. His narration passes through now and past, England and Malaysia, and even Heaven (salvation) and Hell (evil); “...some memories are not evanescent and that ‘certain happenings would leave indelible and distressing memories—memories to which the sufferer was continually returning, and by which he was tormented by day and by night’” (Caruth 158). After the narration of his present living condition of a garden, he recalls the encounter of Johnny in a coffee shop of Singapore. He is attracted by Johnny and decides to find him in Malaya. And then come back to the present garden, which trigger the memory of his childhood, because in his home, there is a small garden which provides a little comfort to his fragile heart. The garden is cared by an old gardener Robinson who is dispensed by Peter’s mother. Robinson invites Peter to take part in the gardening work, which provides happiness and hope in little Peter’s life at that time. But after he is dismissed, “the plants soon went to seed and the garden finally—fittingly, one might say—became a dilapidated mess” (Aw 249). Peter’s heart may turn back to the same barren land.

The trauma of childhood always invaded his sleep even though he is quite old; “What appears before me is the late-winter view from my bedroom as I stand at the dormer looking at the neat rows of box hedge against a snow-softened landscape, the topiary animals poised under a chalky sky. Although the hard bare beds sparkle with frost, I know that soon it will be spring, and life will return to the garden once more” (Aw 249). The description indicates his friendship with Johnny and new life in Malaysia. So that Peter goes on talking about his research on Johnny. and meets him when Johnny is saving his father-in-law out of fire. And then Peter goes back to the current life to talk with Alvaro about the function of garden. It “is a re-creation of the Garden of Eden” (Aw 256) ... “It can save human spirit and provide shelter for human soul and disperse the creeping darkness of the jungle around us and we may find peace in it” (Aw 257). He then contrasts the jungle with garden; “The jungle is alive and it is dangerous” (Aw 257). He recalls the day when Johnny leads him to walk across the Cameron Highlands in jungle full of misery and danger. Through conversations between Peter and Johnny, Johnny begins to talk about a secret but interrupted with Peter’s traveling for holiday in France in his teens, when he sees a vast carpet of lily in the valley; “It made me think of the woods near Hemscott, my poor dilapidated home. It was enough to make my lips tremble, I am ashamed to admit” (Aw 266). Then Peter talks about the new garden’s a mixture of all the beautiful flowers, including those coming from China, Japan and other Eastern countries. He thinks of it because he has believed he would never have friends not only when he is young, but also, he is aged at present. But Johnny talks about his secret to him, he treats Peter as the most trusted friend, who can transcend life and death. Johnny tells Peter he is a Communist, which is the most dangerous in the period:

For those few brief seconds, I found myself looking into the face of a friend, the first and only one I would ever have, the only one I would ever love. For it is true, isn’t it: greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. That is what I was taught at school. I always laughed at what seemed to me a perverse linking of love, friendship and sacrifice—never would it apply to me, I thought. (Aw 271)

Peter describes their walk in the mountain, and they enter into a small empty dark house; “One of the smaller rooms reminded me of my bedroom at Hemscott, its low ceiling instantly

recalling the lonely sanctuary of my childhood” (Aw 289). Johnny comes into the room and finds Peter standing beside the window, looking sad and asks Peter if he is all right. Peter goes on talking about his trauma in childhood, the meaning of his name. Nearly seventy years ago, Brother Anthony calls Peter Wormwood, the work of the Devil. He asks Peter to read the verse from Bible loudly, and struck Peter with blow and orders to read louder. Poor little Peter continues to read through choking breaths and eyes are clouded with hot tears; “Every time I was punished, I was made to read that passage, as if repeating it would rid me of the bitterness of my name, myself. After an only short whilst I could recite it by heart without recourse to the Bible, and the beating too, became bearable. I stopped hating the good Brother Anthony, but when I meet him in purgatory, I will have to tell him that it didn’t work: I remember the words, but all my bitterness is still there” (Aw 291).

Peter then narrates his bitterness in Malaysia, which is his adoration to Snow who falls in love with Kunichica, a secret Japanese police. He has found it when they take part in a drama performance and ensure about it when they travel to the Seven Maiden Islands for the honeymoon of Johnny and Snow. Peter is struggling, because on the one hand, there is friendship between him and Johnny, on the other hand, is it love toward Johnny’s wife Snow. He cannot bear Snow’s betrayal to her husband, and deceive of Kunichica to Snow, and Johnny’s coward to protect Snow and try to win back her heart. That’s why when Johnny is dead, Peter refuses to know him. Once Peter and Johnny are trusted friends; “I truly believed I would die for him. Now, in the cold light of old age I can see I was merely fooling myself: I was never as noble as that” (Aw 272). Peter’s narration is based on his track of mind from present garden life to childhood home bitterness, or to the record of Johnny, swaying side to side on the time pole, according to the reminiscence of trauma. But he prefers to stay in the present garden which is the healing site for trauma. This garden is like the Eden Garden, full of honey and milk in spirit, which will break the limitation of space to support him forever.

CONCLUSION

Tash Aw is one of the contemporary Chinese-Malaysian writers who is talented in introspective novels reflecting their characters’ memory and cosmopolitan novels with broader visions of different countries, such as Malaya, China, Britain, Indonesia and Japan. Based on Cathy Caruth’s theory, the study explores the repetition, belated and numbing features of memory of characters in Tash Aw’s *The Harmony Silk Factory* (2005), caused by trauma of war, colonial oppression, death of a loved, racial discrimination and even domestic violence. The study also investigates the process of narratives of characters in the selected novel in the aspect of chronological discourse order and spatial discourse patterns. It adopts circular discourse time order which could present the belatedness and repetition of trauma. Jungle and home are the location of suffering of story space and garden and sea are considered as spatial symbols of salvation from trauma of discourse space. The narrations sway from past to present, from Hell (jungle, lonely home) to Heaven (garden, sea), and vice versa, from which trauma brings fragments of memory and shapes the victims’ narratives. In turn, narratives may heal trauma and may reconstruct linear time order by contact, conversation, reading, listening and telling out of the traumatic experiences. If the narrative has been done, it will become witness and cultural healing to other collectives. The cross-disciplinary study between narratology and trauma theory becomes possible and feasible, in which the interrelationship between narrative and trauma is needed to be studied. This is the gap in the research on Tash Aw’s works, which has been analysed by combining narratology by Michael Toolan and trauma theory by Cathy

Caruth. The study demonstrates some reasonable narrative approaches to relieve or even overcome the negative impacts of trauma towards the protagonists in the selected novel.

The protagonists in the selected novel suffer from the vision of traumatic events often in the form of nightmares, flashbacks or intrusive images. Jasper's loss of mother tortures him in the form of nightmares. Similar landscape with the site of traumas or even the same things and people in the place where traumas occur may also trigger repetition of hurt. The same genre of flowers in Malaya can bring Peter's memories of violence in England. The chronological discourse order and spatial discourse patterns could present the belatedness and repetition of trauma, but finally reach the normal linear time sequence which is in accordance with story time in normal consciousness, so that the narrators or the protagonists can understand what has happened to them when they encountered catastrophic events in the past. Garden and sea are as spatial symbols of salvation from trauma and home and jungle are as the Hell of suffering in the selected novels. The narrations sway from past to present, from Hell to Heaven, but finally reach the balance to the healing traumas. Thus, trauma can strongly influence people's memory, which will become belated and repetitive of images or recalling of catastrophic events. Narratology is a kind of study which deals with the approaches of telling stories. Discourse time has two forms as circular time and linear time. In order to reflect the traumatic effects of "repetition" (Caruth, 17) and "belatedness" (Caruth, 17), circular time is usually adopted in the selected novel. After the narration of events in circular time, the victims' psychological disorder may be healed because they finally comprehend what has happened to them and form the normal linear time sequence in their consciousness. Except for time, the story space usually is the site of trauma or even the triggering of traumatic memories. However, some discourse space of telling stories may become the healing space of trauma, like the garden and sea in *The Harmony Silk Factory*.

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