

Trauma and Recovery in Oscar Hokeah's *Calling for a Blanket Dance*: A Caruthian Reading

Denny Apriyadi

Universitas Pamulang
Email: denny.apriyadi24@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to examine the traumatic experiences and recovery process of the main character in *Calling for a Blanket Dance* (2023) by Oscar Hokeah. The novel follows Ever Geimausaddle, a Native American protagonist, as he navigates cycles of pain, resilience, and eventual healing. Through a multi-perspective narrative structure, Ever's life is shaped by repeated encounters with trauma, rooted in both personal and cultural histories. This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to analyze narrative and dialogic elements from the novel. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's (1996) trauma theory, the study investigates how trauma is represented and processed throughout the text. The findings reveal that Ever's experiences align with four key symptoms of trauma: flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and avoidance. These symptoms manifest across various stages of his life, affecting his psychological state and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the study identifies several pathways to recovery portrayed in the novel, including the role of community support, reconnection with family, and the healing potential of storytelling. These coping mechanisms are central to Ever's gradual healing and highlight the importance of culturally rooted resilience. Ultimately, the novel illustrates not only the enduring impact of trauma but also the transformative potential of collective healing and narrative expression. This research contributes to literary trauma studies by offering insight into Indigenous trauma narratives and the culturally embedded practices that foster recovery.

Keywords: femininity, gender subversion, gender performativity, gender stereotype, masculinity.

A. Introduction

Trauma is broadly defined as a psychological response to deeply distressing or disturbing experiences that overwhelm an individual's ability to cope (APA, 2013). It may result from violence, abuse, displacement, discrimination, or systemic marginalization. In the Native American context, trauma frequently stems from historical and ongoing colonization, forced removals, cultural erasure, and racial violence (Brave Heart et al., 2011). As the National Institute of Justice (2023) reports, 84% of Native American women and 81% of men have experienced violence in some form—testifying to a continuing legacy of trauma within these communities. Such violence leads to psychological conditions like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression (Sareen, 2014), and its effects often reverberate across generations.

Scholars such as Bassett et al. (2014) have pointed out that trauma recovery cannot be understood through a one-size-fits-all model. The process of healing is shaped by variables including gender, age, personality, culture, and spiritual beliefs. Indigenous communities, in particular, often use culturally embedded methods—such as ceremonies, oral storytelling, and reconnection with ancestral traditions—to process trauma. Literature becomes a crucial platform through which such complex processes can be portrayed and analyzed.

In recent years, trauma theory has emerged as a powerful tool in literary studies to explore how texts represent psychological suffering, memory, and recovery. Drawing on the works of Caruth (1996), LaCapra (2001), and others, scholars examine how narratives attempt to make sense of what is often unspeakable. However, much of the scholarship in trauma studies has focused on Euro-American contexts, with limited engagement in Indigenous literature. This gap underlines the importance of analyzing narratives like *Calling for a Blanket Dance* to understand trauma as experienced by Native American characters in culturally specific ways.

Oscar Hokeah's *Calling for a Blanket Dance* tells the story of Ever Geimausaddle, a Kiowa-Cherokee-Mexican American boy who grows up amid poverty, family instability, systemic racism, and violence. Structured through multiple narrative voices, the novel reveals how trauma is not only personal but collective, passed down through generations and experienced differently by each family member. The text also explores the nuanced process of healing—through family support, community solidarity, cultural practices, and reclaiming identity.

This study aims to analyze the representation of trauma and trauma recovery in Hokeah's novel. Specifically, it addresses two main questions: (1) How are the traumatic experiences depicted by the main character in *Calling for a Blanket Dance*? and (2) How is the trauma recovery portrayed by the main character? By focusing on these questions, the research provides insight into how literary representation can contribute to a broader understanding of trauma, especially within marginalized communities.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the growing field of Indigenous literary studies and trauma theory. While previous research has explored trauma in Indigenous narratives (e.g., King, 2012; Justice, 2018), fewer works have focused specifically on contemporary Native American novels that blend multiple identities and intersecting traumas. Moreover, Hokeah's text offers an innovative narrative structure and rich cultural content that merit deeper academic engagement. By drawing attention to trauma and resilience in this context, the study underscores the power of literature to foster empathy, cultural understanding, and healing.

Ultimately, this research not only enhances scholarly knowledge but also has pedagogical and social implications. It can inform educators, counselors, and

community leaders about the culturally specific ways in which trauma and recovery are experienced and expressed. More broadly, it advocates for the inclusion of diverse narratives in literary discourse—particularly those that challenge dominant representations and offer authentic voices from historically marginalized communities.

B. Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the depiction of trauma and recovery in *Calling for a Blanket Dance* by Oscar Hokeah. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for examining complex social phenomena, allowing researchers to explore lived experiences, meanings, and cultural contexts in depth (Daverne & Wittorski, 2022; Lim, 2024). As such, this approach is appropriate for capturing the emotional and psychological nuances embedded within literary texts, especially those addressing historical and intergenerational trauma. The primary data for this study consists of the novel *Calling for a Blanket Dance* (2022), which serves as the central text for analysis. This novel was selected for its thematic focus on Native American identity, intergenerational trauma, and cultural resilience. The data source includes the narrative structure, character development, dialogue, and descriptive passages that reveal the protagonist's traumatic experiences and recovery process. Data collection was conducted through intensive close reading, annotation, and coding of the novel's key passages. The researcher focused particularly on scenes involving violence, loss, systemic marginalization, and cultural expression, as these elements are central to the representation of trauma and its aftermath. The data analysis employed thematic analysis informed by trauma theory and Indigenous literary criticism. Special attention was paid to how trauma is conveyed through literary devices such as imagery, symbolism, and narrative voice. The analysis was guided by existing frameworks from Caruth (1996), LaCapra (2001), and Brave Heart et al. (2011), with an emphasis on the psychological and cultural dimensions of trauma and healing in Indigenous contexts.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Trauma Experiences depicted by the Main Character

Traumatic experiences, according to Caruth (Caruth, 1996, p. 4), are defined as an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events, where the response to the event happens later, often in a delayed or repetitive manner. The responses to traumatic experiences can cause symptoms. The key points of trauma experience symptoms are flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and avoidance. The novel *Calling for a Blanket Dance* depicts all of the traumatic experience symptoms: flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and avoidance.

1.1.Flashback

Based on the the quotation above, it can be illustrated that Ever's unconscious reaction to Boo Right's words, which echo the violent rhetoric of his father. Boo Right's statements about fighting and violence serve as a trigger, reminding Ever of his father's similar language. The fact that Ever feels charmed by Boo Right's words suggests that his trauma is shaping his perception, pulling him toward a cycle of violence that mirrors his father's influence. By being drawn to Boo Right, Ever is not just remembering his father's aggression—he is reliving the emotional impact of being raised around that mentality. This highlights how trauma imprints itself on a survivor's subconscious, influencing their choices and relationships in ways they may not fully understand. Caruth (1996) argued that trauma is characterized by the inability to fully process the original event, which instead returns through involuntary repetitions or relived experiences—commonly known as flashbacks. The quote below also demonstrates this : "*Ever was now wide awake in Turtle's arms, looking out from underneath the blanket. His eyes caught the officer's eyes. He was so close to the violence, too close to the rage.*" (Hokeah, 2023, p. 12).

The quote above illustrates Ever's wide-awake state and intense eye contact with the officer, suggesting that he is imprinting this moment into his memory, making it likely to resurface as a flashback later in his life. The phrase "too close to the violence, too close to the rage" illustrates that trauma is absorbed even when the individual is not actively involved in the event but is merely a witness. Ever may be physically shielded by Turtle's arms and the blanket, but he is still mentally and emotionally exposed to the aggression unfolding before him. Ever's locked gaze with the officer suggests an early understanding of danger and power dynamics, which may later manifest in moments when he feels threatened or powerless. His silent observation mirrors the way trauma survivors often freeze during distressing events, storing fragmented memories that resurface later in distorted or overwhelming ways. This quotation captures a formative moment of trauma that is likely to resurface as a flashback later in Ever's life, demonstrating how unprocessed experiences of violence and fear remain embedded in the mind, shaping future emotional and psychological responses. Caruth (1996) described trauma as an overwhelming experience that is not fully grasped as it occurs but returns later in the form of intrusive symptoms, such as flashbacks: "*If he knew that trailer six was having a birthday party, he would have wiggled his way underneath the neighbor's barbwire fence, pushed through the thicket of thorns until he made it to the ditch by the dirt road. He would have run through the standing water in the ditch until he came to the back fence around his trailer. He would have thrown himself over that fence and snuck into the trailer completely unseen. Anything to avoid being around other kids.*" (Hokeah, 2023, p. 70).

Ever's detailed, almost ritualistic escape plan suggests that he has repeatedly engaged in this type of avoidance before, likely as a response to past traumatic experiences related to social interactions or group settings. His automatic, hyper-detailed reaction to the mere knowledge of a birthday party indicates that his body and mind are responding as if he is in danger. The fact that he is willing to crawl under barbed wire, push through thorns, and wade through water—physical

discomfort that most would avoid—just to escape a social situation suggests that his avoidance is not rational but driven by an underlying, unresolved trauma. The quote below also illustrates this : "*Ever told me about the wrinkles in his father's forehead and veins popping out on his hands, shaking, and he knew that his father must have wanted to sling him into a wall, or take a thumb tack and stick it into his side. He cringed and waited for his punishment.*" (Hokeah, 2023, p. 72).

Based on the quotation above, Ever's detailed focus on his father's physical features, wrinkles, veins, and shaking hands, suggests that his mind has stored these cues as warning signs of impending violence. His automatic physical response, cringing and bracing for punishment, demonstrates how trauma imprints itself on the body. Even though Ever is no longer in immediate danger, his body reacts as if he is, reinforcing the way trauma lingers beyond the original moment of suffering. This quotation highlights how Ever's trauma is not simply a past event but an ongoing psychological and physical experience, as his mind replays the fear, helplessness, and expectation of violence, making it feel as though it is happening again in the present moment.

According to Caruth's (1996) trauma theory, flashbacks are not merely memories but the return of an unassimilated experience—a rupture in consciousness where the past reasserts itself in the present without full understanding. Rather than functioning as deliberate recollection, flashbacks emerge involuntarily, often with the same intensity as the original trauma, because the mind was unable to process the event when it first occurred.

1.2. Nightmare

Nightmares in the context of trauma theory are described as experiences where the traumatic event is not fully grasped in real-time but is instead revisited repeatedly in dreams. These dreams are not simply recollections but rather an attempt by the psyche to process and "master" the trauma, despite never having fully experienced it initially (Caruth, 1996). A key element of these nightmares is the experience of awakening: the shock of waking up from a nightmare can itself be traumatic because it underscores the incompleteness of the initial event and the inability to fully comprehend it at the time it occurred. In the novel, nightmares happen when the character awakens from a disturbing dream. It can be seen in this quote : "*On the day that a social worker stopped by their trailer, Ever was imagining the boogers his mother warned him about. He imagined them to be mud-covered ski-lees, witches, standing crooked and bent, disguised like an old burnt tree and waiting. Akin to a boogeyman.*" (Hokeah, 2023, p. 70)

The quote above reflects the psychological impact of fear and trauma on a child's imagination. Ever's imagination is consumed by distorted, threatening figures—manifestations of a fear that transcends the tangible world around him. The imagery of "mud-covered ski-lees" and "witches" suggests not just an unfounded childhood fear, but an internalized and distorted representation of the dangers Ever feels around him, particularly the threat of abandonment or abuse. This frightening mental image could be tied to nightmares or intrusive thoughts, which are common in traumatic experiences. The "boogeyman" metaphor evokes the idea of a looming, unseen danger that waits in the background, much like the

constant anticipation of harm or neglect in a traumatic environment. This imagined figure represents the child's mind trying to make sense of the real, yet unspoken fears, creating an entity that is both terrifying and ever-present, lurking just beyond the surface of conscious awareness. Caruth (1996) emphasized that traumatic nightmares do not necessarily replicate the original event but symbolically reenact the emotional intensity of an unassimilated experience. This is visible in the following excerpt: "*Chero-Hawk Indian Store and the battered women shelter were more like mirages, from my guess, like the watery spots down a long and straight road. He buried his face, again, into the backpack, the fabric sliding across his forehead, nose, and cheeks, wiping the tears.*" (Hokeah, 2023, p. 80)

2. Trauma Recovery portrayed by the Main Character

Trauma Recovery, according to Caruth (1996), was not just about recalling what happened but also about listening to the voice of the other, recognizing trauma that emerges in shared or relational ways. In the same way, literature plays a unique role in trauma recovery, enacting rather than merely describing it. In terms of form, trauma recovery is not just personal but also collective and historical, requiring revisiting the traumatic past to acknowledge its ongoing influence. With this explanation, trauma recovery can be summed up in two ways there are community support & reconnecting the family, and storytelling.

2.1. Community Support & Reconnecting the Family

People who have experienced trauma should not live alone. One way to overcome trauma is with the help of the community and family. This is because the symptoms of trauma will always disturb the lives of survivors and will last for a long time. The role of the community and family will be very important in overcoming trauma. In the novel, this way appears in the following quote as follow: "*A booger mask helped me overcome a deep fear,*" I told Ever on the day he stared at one on the wall. I asked him, "*Do you have any fears?*" (Hokeah, 2023, p. 77) .

This quote illustrates a nuanced yet significant instance of interpersonal connection and emotional modeling that is essential for trauma recovery via community support and familial reunification. Sharing a personal narrative about conquering fear—employing a comical and disarming symbol such as a "booger mask"—illustrates how vulnerability can serve as a conduit between generations. In trauma rehabilitation, such instances are crucial as they normalize anxiety, encourage communication, and demonstrate the possibility of healing. Through the narration of a personal growth narrative, Hayes (Lena's nephew) provides Ever (presumably a younger relative) not just solace but also a secure emotional environment to contemplate and articulate his anxieties. This interchange involves not only addressing anxiety but also restoring emotional connections, particularly within families affected by trauma, where communication may have been suppressed or weakened.

The inquiry "Do you possess any fears?" transcends casual conversation; it serves as an invitation for visibility, acknowledgment, and acceptance. This form

of attentive listening and subtle nudging exemplifies the relational aspect of healing, wherein one individual's narrative facilitates the emergence of another's. Moreover, the object's simplicity—the mask—underscores how quotidian events, comedy, and collective narratives may possess significant emotional resonance. Recovery was not about mastering or resolving trauma through rational control, but rather through shared acknowledgment and empathetic engagement. It was called an “awakening to the incomprehensible” in the presence of another (Caruth, 1996). This is evident in the following passage: “I heard things in that hospital room my family had never said before. My abuela told Ever she was sorry her son didn't do right by him. Then Ever apologized for not showing up to his father's funeral, and Sissy said she was sorry, too. Turtle apologized to my grandparents for not making Ever and Sissy go to the funeral. My father said he had not been a good uncle to Ever, and it hit me in the heart. And then Ever apologized to my father for abandoning the family, and I suddenly wondered if we hadn't abandoned him. Then my grandparents apologized for something I thought I'd never hear them say: my tio being abusive.” (Hokeah, 2023, p. 181)

The quote reflects a deeply emotional moment of collective reflection, a reciprocal apology, and belated recognition, which are fundamental to community support and familial reconciliation in the context of trauma healing. In trauma theory, healing typically commences not with answers, but with truth-telling and witnessing, particularly within the family, where silence and denial may obscure enduring grief. The atmosphere of vulnerability and distress in this hospital room catalyzes intergenerational candor. Apologies are exchanged among siblings, grandparents, children, and extended family, disrupting a cycle of evasion and substituting it with active recognition of wrongdoing and responsibility. Every individual's acknowledgment—be it neglect, absence, or facilitative behavior—fosters a communal healing environment where accountability is embraced rather than evaded.

This phase is particularly essential in trauma recovery due to the conversion of silence into articulation. The recognition of abuse by the grandparents, an admission previously deemed inconceivable, is notably impactful. It signifies the dissolution of a protracted denial and the commencement of emotional restoration. This acknowledgment affirms the survivor's experience and reinstates relational trust, which is fundamental to psychological rehabilitation. This moment illustrates how an apology serves as both a mechanism for repair and a means of reconnection. Ever's apologies for his absence at his father's burial transcend mere personal confession. The quote encapsulates a profound emotional instance of group reflection, reciprocal remorse, and long-awaited recognition, which are fundamental to community support and familial reconciliation in the context of trauma healing. In trauma theory, healing typically commences not with answers, but with truth-telling and witnessing, particularly within the family, where silence and denial may obscure enduring grief (Caruth, 1996).

The quote above highlights the power of communal rituals, particularly those grounded in cultural tradition, in reinvigorating the spirit and fostering healing in the aftermath of Ever's trauma. The blanket dance serves as a symbol of collective care, offering not only material support but also spiritual and emotional

revitalization. The phrase "we were filled with a renewed energy" suggests that the dance not only provides material support but also affirmation, solidarity, and visibility for those experiencing pain or need. The blanket dance also symbolizes memory and permanence in healing, counteracting feelings of abandonment or isolation. The contrast between the filled blanket and the filled spirit represents a movement from lack to abundance, suggesting that healing is possible when the community holds space for pain. The blanket dance also reinforces the idea that reconnection can be re-established through shared participation in ancestral or community rituals, which can restore generational threads disrupted by colonization, violence, or historical trauma. In conclusion, the blanket dance serves as a ceremonial act of collective healing, where giving is sacred, presence is powerful, and the community becomes the vessel through which memory, energy, and love are restored. The following excerpt also shows this: "*We danced, the way Kiowas danced, when called by our people, by our ancestors, to help each other heal.*" (Hokeah, 2023, p. 205)

The quote highlights the importance of cultural traditions, particularly those involving embodied practice like dance, in Ever's trauma recovery, family reconnection, and collective resilience. Dance is ground in cultural specificity, as it is ceremonial, inherited, and sacred, serving as a ritual of restoration for the community as a whole. Ancestral invocation is a source of strength, as it activates healing through ancestral memory, reminding participants that their recovery is part of a larger historical and spiritual lineage. Rituals are called forth in response to suffering, highlighting a value system where kinship and interdependence take precedence. Family is also considered an expansive and spiritual aspect, as the term "our people" transcends the nuclear family and points to a broader kinship network. Dance reinforces the idea that responding to others' pain is a familial obligation, grounded in love and tradition. This quote highlights the sacred role of cultural practices in trauma healing, particularly those that invoke ancestral ties and collective responsibility. This is clear in the next quote: "*Ever was so angry. I got an earful on the drive back to Lawton. He was too mad and too young to really understand.*" (Hokeah, 2023, p. 93)

The quote above highlights a moment of emotional rupture within a familial relationship, particularly between generations. It highlights the complex dynamics of Ever's trauma recovery within family and community systems. Anger is often a symptom of unprocessed pain, especially in younger family members who may carry inherited emotional weight. Generational misunderstanding and the need for patience are also highlighted. In trauma-impacted families, elders hold context, while youth feel the effects but may lack the language or insight to process them. Recognizing this is the first step to reconnection, allowing older family members to respond with empathy instead of reaction. The car ride metaphor represents transition and containment, indicating that the connection hasn't been severed, which is vital in trauma recovery. Community support often begins in family dialogue, even imperfect ones, as it signals a move toward visibility and recognition. This brief but loaded moment reflects how intergenerational trauma recovery is rarely smooth or free from conflict (Caruth, 1996). This idea is also

evident in the following passage: “*My sister, Turtle, had called me that night. ‘Ever is on the streets of ‘Darko. Lila, can you pick him up?’*” (Hokeah, 2023, p. 84)

The quote implies that family-based intervention in Ever’s trauma recovery is essential. It highlights the role of siblings as first responders in trauma, acting swiftly when a family member is in distress. This form of grassroots, relational care is often absent or distrusted in Indigenous, marginalized, or trauma-impacted communities. The line “Lila, can you pick him up?” is not just a logistical request but a passing of responsibility, rooted in trust and urgency. The use of Lila’s name adds emotional weight, signaling that this is not a casual ask, but a plea issued between those who understand the stakes. The phrase “Ever is on the streets of ‘Darko” signals that Ever is exposed in a potentially unsafe place, a form of protection and love. This act of locating someone is a form of care in itself, reflecting the distributed nature of care in families. Picking someone up becomes a physical metaphor for emotional reconnection, as trauma often isolates individuals. The choice to step in for Ever, even if prompted, reflects how healing happens through small, consistent gestures of not giving up on one another. The quote below reveals this idea: “*Ever was then responsible for pulling orders by himself for the rest of the day... By the time my son came home from work he was exhausted and had decided that he would never return to Greenleaf Nursery again. Instead, my son was joining the Army.*” (Hokeah, 2023, p. 116).

The quote above illustrates the fragility of support systems and the urgent need for belonging, purpose, and structure. Burnout as a catalyst for escape suggests a lack of support, possibly even a moment of being left to struggle alone, physically and emotionally. The job as a failed site of belonging becomes a symbol of disappointment and rejection, as the environment did not offer the community, mentorship, or affirmation that Ever may have needed in his recovery journey. Joining the Army as a search for structure and identity can be interpreted as a search for purpose, order, and a sense of belonging, qualities that trauma survivors often crave. The lack of community support as the missing link reveals how trauma can deepen when support networks are thin, inattentive, or overwhelmed themselves. The quote calls for stronger familial and community safety nets, where exhaustion is seen, shared, and softened before it becomes a reason to disappear.

According to Caruth's (1996) trauma theory, reconnecting with family and community support serves as a vital venue for bearing witness to unresolved or unsaid memories. Trauma, which is typified by its delayed comprehension and obsessive return, may find resonance in shared relational structures as well as in individual contemplation. Communities and families create conditions for fragmented memory and unclaimed experience to start to emerge via acts of listening, presence, and collective acknowledgment. Instead of providing a remedy, this kind of assistance enables moral interaction with pain that is inexpressible. Caruth (1996) stated that communal and familial bonds are crucial to the continuous process of identification, testifying, and healing since the recovery of traumatic past depends not only on narration but also on encountering those who can absorb that narrative.

2.2. Storytelling

According to Caruth (1996), storytelling allows for delayed processing of the second wound by giving voice to the unspoken experience. The repetition of wounding symbolizes how trauma returns unconsciously, and through narrative, the survivor can articulate the truth of what was previously unrepresentable. Literature and storytelling serve as enactments of trauma, allowing readers to speak the unspeakable and bear witness to the silent aspects of trauma. In the novel, storytelling is depicted in the quote below: “*Was it my guilty conscience? The way I left Lonnie all those years ago, tormenting her until she loved the misery of meth more than the misery of my revenge.*” (Hokeah, 2023, p. 239).

The quote above implied a raw, introspective moment of narrative reckoning that illustrates the role of storytelling in trauma recovery. Storytelling serves as self-confrontation, allowing Ever to face their role in another's trauma. It also reclaims complex truths, acknowledging a cycle of harm that contributed to someone's self-destruction. This is a crucial step in narrative-based trauma healing, as recovery requires recounting what was done to someone and what was done to others. Memory as moral reckoning is another aspect of storytelling, as it serves as moral witnessing, making space for unclaimed, unspoken, or suppressed pasts. The intertwining of two traumas is another aspect of storytelling, as it blurs the boundaries between victim and perpetrator, suggesting that both are wounded, though in different ways (Caruth, 1996).

Storytelling becomes a bridge between damaged lives, possibly a first step toward understanding, forgiveness, or atonement, even if it's only internal. Storytelling in trauma recovery is not always redemptive, but always revelatory, surface guilt, confront past harm, and give shape to painful memory. This concept is also presented in the following quote: “*I started to give Davetta my routine answer since moving back to Tahlequah from Lawton, but in the end told her the whole story.*” (Hokeah, 2023, p. 237).

The quote above illuminates a pivotal moment in Ever's storytelling as a form of trauma recovery. The phrase "routine answer" suggests a rehearsed, emotionally safe script, which serves as a psychological shield in trauma contexts. However, the decision to tell the whole story marks a shift from self-protection to openness and honest disclosure. In trauma recovery, storytelling allows individuals to integrate fragmented experiences into a narrative form, especially when told in trusted spaces. The act of telling the whole story suggests that healing often requires relational safety, as it is not just about speaking but also being heard. This underscores the role of community and interpersonal connection in recovery. The movement "from Lawton to Tahlequah" represents a shift in life circumstances, possibly a return to roots or a reckoning with the past. The act of telling the whole story can untangle how trauma shaped decisions, identity, and relationships. Thus, authentic storytelling in trauma recovery is transformative, as it allows Ever to move beyond a safe script and speak the full truth, leading to emotional release and connection. It can be seen in the quote that follows: “*Today, I turn forty. Sitting in my car, I write today as I have on every birthday. But I don't have sheet paper. But I found a roll of paper towels in the backseat of my car.*” (Hokeah, 2023, p. 109)

The quote above beautifully illustrates how Ever's storytelling in trauma recovery is both a ritual of survival and an act of resilience, even when the tools are improvised and the setting is humble. This moment highlights themes of continuity, adaptation, and self-witnessing. The use of a roll of paper towels as a confessional signifies the resilience of storytelling, even in imperfect circumstances. The car as a liminal space adds a layer of solitude and movement, suggesting a life still in progress. Writing from the car conveys a moment of solitude and reclaim. Turning forty carries symbolic weight, as it signifies a threshold for self-reflection and self-witnessing. Birthdays in trauma recovery often stir reflection, regret, endurance, and identity questions. Writing on that day is a way to stitch the past and present together, however roughly. This quote captures the essence of storytelling's ability to persist even in scarcity. Healing narratives do not require perfect conditions, just the will to speak and the courage to remember.

Storytelling emerges as a vital means through which unassimilated experience seeks expression beyond the limits of direct understanding. Trauma, defined by its belated return and resistance to full representation, finds its form not in straightforward narration but in fragmented, delayed, and often indirect accounts. Storytelling becomes the space where silence, repetition, and rupture give voice to what remains unspeakable. According to Caruth (1996), the act of telling is not about mastering the traumatic event, but about bearing witness to its incompleteness, allowing the story to speak through gaps, echoes, and disruptions. In this sense, storytelling is both a mode of survival and a call for ethical listening, making it central to the process of acknowledging and engaging with trauma's lingering presence.

D. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis, the findings indicate that the selected picture books Oscar Hokeah's *Calling for a Blanket Dance* offers a nuanced portrayal of trauma and recovery through the life of Ever Geimausaddle, whose experiences align with Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. Ever's flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and avoidance behaviors reveal the psychological aftermath of violence, abandonment, and systemic marginalization—experiences reflective of broader Native American histories. However, the novel also traces a compelling arc of recovery, where community support, familial reconciliation, and storytelling emerge as powerful tools for healing. Through these strategies, Hokeah illustrates that trauma need not define one's future, and that healing is possible through connection, accountability, and narrative reassembly.

This study contributes to trauma literature by highlighting how Indigenous narratives complicate and enrich trauma theory. While Caruth emphasizes the unknowability of trauma, *Calling for a Blanket Dance* repositions trauma as both personal and collective, situated within intergenerational contexts and cultural resilience. It advances the conversation by demonstrating how healing practices—such as oral storytelling and communal support—function as culturally embedded responses to trauma.

Beyond theoretical implications, this analysis emphasizes the representational power of literature. Hokeah's novel validates underrepresented voices and offers visibility to the complexities of Native American identity, intergenerational suffering, and emotional survival. Literature, in this context, serves not only as a site of trauma representation but also as a medium of resistance and restoration.

Future research should expand on this intersection of trauma studies and Indigenous literature by incorporating postcolonial, ecocritical, or decolonial frameworks. Comparative studies across different Indigenous or marginalized communities could also deepen our understanding of culturally specific trauma responses. Overall, this study reaffirms the importance of diverse literary representations in both illuminating lived trauma and imagining pathways toward healing.

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