



## The Depiction of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder from The Main Character in *The Shadow of No Towers* Graphic Novel

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### Article Info

### Abstract

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The purpose of this research is to analyze psychoanalytic issues, specifically post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as depicted in the graphic novel *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2002) by Art Spiegelman. The study utilizes a descriptive qualitative method to gather and interpret data from the text, focusing on how PTSD is portrayed. Data collection involved a detailed examination of the graphic novel, capturing how Spiegelman illustrates the trauma and psychological impact of the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center attacks, which affected him personally. The analysis is guided by Cathy Charut's (1996) theory of post-trauma, which provides a framework for understanding how traumatic events are represented and processed. The results reveal that *In the Shadow of No Towers* vividly portrays PTSD through its narrative and visual elements, reflecting Spiegelman's own experiences and emotional responses to the attacks. The graphic novel's depiction of trauma is analyzed to show how it affects the author's psyche and how it manifests in his work. This study contributes to the understanding of trauma representation in graphic literature.

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## INTRODUCTION

Memoirs, derived from the French word “*mémoire*” meaning “memory,” are narratives written from the author's perspective, focusing on significant personal experiences retold as a story (Dukes, 2018). Unlike autobiographies, which cover an individual's entire life, memoirs concentrate on specific events or periods, providing the author with more creative flexibility while preserving factual accuracy. The term “graphic memoir” is relatively new and refers to a subgenre of graphic novels where autobiographical or semi-autobiographical stories are conveyed through comics, often termed “non-fiction graphic novels” (Spencer, 2022).

There are several types of memoirs, including confessional memoirs, which reveal the author's painful secrets; transformation memoirs, documenting personal challenges and growth; professional or celebrity memoirs, detailing notable achievements; and travel memoirs, exploring experiences in different places (Spencer, 2022).

Art Spiegelman, a renowned graphic novel memoirist, is known for *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (1986) and *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began* (1991), which elevated comic storytelling to a sophisticated literary medium (Ray, 2022). Spiegelman, influenced by *Mad* magazine and counterculture icon R. Crumb, began his career as a professional artist and later contributed significantly to underground comics.

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, Spiegelman published *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), a collection of broadsheet-sized comics reflecting his personal experiences and emotional response to the event. This graphic novel merges autobiographical elements with experimental art, exploring the profound impact of 9/11 through a blend of history, reality, fact, fiction, and emotion. Spiegelman has noted that the book served as a means to cope with the PTSD he experienced following the attacks.

Trauma, as described by Caruth (1996), involves overwhelming responses to catastrophic events, often marked by delayed, uncontrolled reactions, and recurring intrusive phenomena. It encompasses both physical and emotional dimensions, with symptoms including anxiety, helplessness, mood swings, behavioral changes, sleep disturbances, confusion, increased heart rate, and body aches (American Psychological Association, 1987)..

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental illness that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, sequence of events, or sequence of situations. (Carruth, 1996), this can be emotionally or physically damaging, life-threatening, and impair mental, physical, social, and/or mental health. Examples include natural disasters, serious accidents, terrorist attacks, wars/battles, sexual assaults, and historical traumas. PTSD has gone by many names in the past, such as “shell shock” during World War I and “battle fatigue” after World War II. It can affect anyone and at any age, and women are at higher risk of developing PTSD than men. People with PTSD have intense thoughts and feelings about their experiences that linger long after the traumatic event is over. They may relive events through flashbacks, they may also experience anger, sadness, or fear, and they may feel alienated or alienated from others. People with PTSD often avoid situations or people that remind them of the traumatic event..

## METHODS

The writers employed a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the data, focusing on the rich, nuanced narratives that qualitative research uniquely provides. As Huberman (1994) emphasizes, “Qualitative data, usually in the form of words rather than numbers,” offers a profound depth of understanding. He further describes qualitative data as “sexy,” noting its ability to deliver “well-grounded, rich description and explanations of processes in the identifiable local context” (p. 1). This approach is particularly useful for exploring complex phenomena like trauma, as it allows for detailed, contextualized insights that are not easily captured by numerical data alone.

In analyzing Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, the qualitative descriptive method enables a thorough examination of his experiences with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following the September 11 attacks. By using this method, the writers can present a descriptive narrative that deeply explores Spiegelman's emotional and psychological responses. This narrative approach provides a comprehensive view of how trauma is depicted in the graphic memoir, reflecting the author's personal experiences and interpretations. The qualitative descriptive method, therefore, allows for a richer understanding of the text, offering insights into the intricate ways Spiegelman processes and represents his trauma through the graphic memoir..

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in In The Shadow of No Towers

*In The Shadow of No Tower* clearly represents trauma by providing an illustrative depiction of the author's memory, in the form of a comic providing further complexity such as giving many hidden meanings to the chaos and raising questions about the disgrace of the political system that existed. Spiegelman shares his traumatic experience in a form of a comic. Together with his intention to entertain the reader, Spiegelman also shares the bitter truth about the political conditions that happen during the WTC towers bombing incidents in 1999. Combine with his cartoon style and his classic political sarcasm, Spiegelman really did a good job on putting his imagery towards his works. Here the writers put several data in the comic to show how Spiegelman shares his traumatizing memories in his artwork.

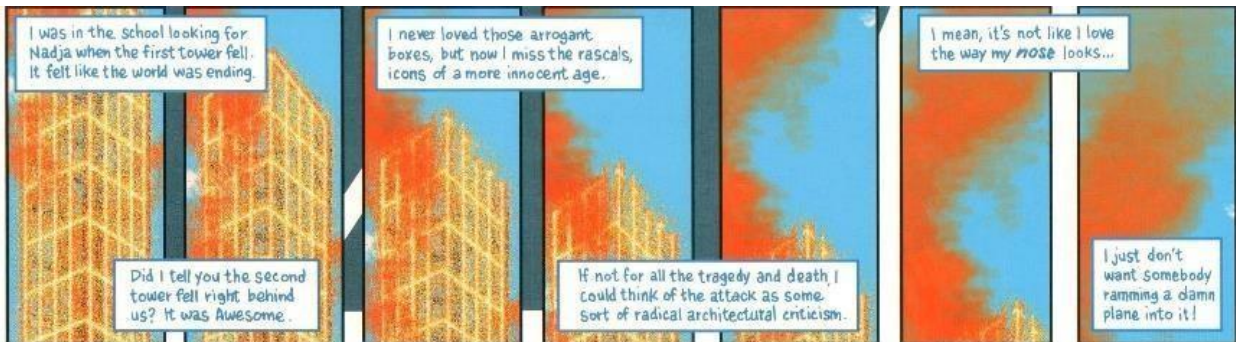
#### *Datum 1*



*Note. From In The Shadow of No Towers (p, 1, 2002)*

In this panel is a representation of the trauma experienced by the main character in this graphic novel, this sentence describes the trauma that continues to be imagined, "*Many months have passed. It's time to move on... I guess I'm finally up to about September 20th.*" The month of September symbolises the tragedy that happened and is an ironic thing that causes trauma that can't be lost from the main character's head "*Okay! Let's say it's NOT September anymore...*" (p, 1). Caruth (1996) stated that "post-traumatic stress disorder reflects the direct imposition on the mind of the unavoidable reality of horrific events, the taking over of the mind, psychically and neurobiologically, by an event that it cannot control." (p, 68). Spiegelman draws the building into the fire as it was falling slowly and burn to the ground. This is the indicator that Spiegelman suffers from PTSD.

Datum 2.



Note. From *In The Shadow of No Towers* (p, 2, 2002)

In the second data, the main character describes the situation that occurred during the 9/11 tragedy, he describes and fantasizes like the end of the world "I was in the school looking for Nadja when the first tower fell. It felt like the world was ending." (p, 2), this line means that the main character did not expect that someone would dare to plan such a thing, he also added "I mean, it's not like I love the way my nose looks...Did I tell you the second tower fell right behind us? It was Awesome. If not for all the tragedy and death, I could think of the attack as some sort of radical architectural criticism. I just don't want Somebody ramming a damn plane into it.", This line represents something about feelings, where humanity is questioned and debated over events that cause severe trauma. Spiegelman tries to forget these traumatizing memories, but the fire remains of the towers mean that it still haunts him.

Datum 3



Note. From *In The Shadow of No Towers* (p, 10, 2002)

In the third data, the Spiegelman shows he carrying an eagle figure with a time bomb take form into two towers, even though it is almost two years since the 9/11 incident, Spiegelman still prolonged in a trauma, even though one can forget by doing daily activities, the hurt feelings experienced by this incident will not go away. He said "But everyone knew it was the ticking of a giant time bomb, and then continued. Still, even anxious new yorkers eventually run out of adrenaline..." and the word BOOM! "...Then you go back to thinking that you might live forever after all!" (p, 10). It can be seen that even though the 9/11 incident has passed, Spiegelman feels very anxious even though there are no more incidents, such as



because prolonged trauma makes people's minds repeat dark pasts. Thinking that maybe humans feel eternal life without knowing where death will come. Creating a stigma that terrorists are Arabs who carry out bombings based on religion, here there is a value of hatred to this. People who are well-known for prolonged trauma cannot distinguish what is the basis of religion, not because they only remember that a person wears strong religious attributes and cannot judge behaviour that is bad or good. Caruth (1998) said that the person with traumatic experiences is often judgmental of certain things related to the cause of the traumas.

*Datum 4*



*Note. From In The Shadow of No Towers (p, 7, 2002)*

In the fourth data, someone in this character starts to think about the events of 9/11 who feels a close experience of his death in September, to be traumatized, to be nostalgic about seeing other people having a horrible death. They talked about why America should have this kind of ownership. Then he declared "*I should feel safer under here, BUT - DAMN IT - I can't see a thing.*" (p, 7) Even though they feel safe about this problem, they have arrested the perpetrators who bombed on 9/11 and were sentenced to death. The residents already feel protected by the authorities and have built monuments to commemorate the victims of 9/11, but their minds will always remember them forever.

## CONCLUSION

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric condition that can develop in individuals who have experienced or witnessed traumatic events, such as a series of distressing circumstances or singular catastrophic incidents. PTSD often manifests through symptoms like hypervigilance, paranoia, and heightened emotional responses. Individuals with PTSD may also exhibit judgmental attitudes towards others, reflecting their own internal turmoil and distrust. In literary works, PTSD is frequently depicted to illustrate the psychological impact of trauma. Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* is a poignant example of this portrayal. Spiegelman uses graphic illustrations to represent the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, embedding symbols of trauma and judgment within his art. For instance, in his drawings, he depicts an eagle with dynamite, symbolizing the World Trade Center towers during their collapse. This imagery, alongside his transformation of the eagle into Arabic figures, suggests the complex ways in which trauma and prejudice can intertwine. The use of such symbols indicates that PTSD not only affects individuals' emotional states but also influences their perceptions and judgments about others. Spiegelman's artwork thus provides a visual representation of how trauma can lead to a heightened sense of paranoia and judgment, revealing the deep psychological scars left by such catastrophic events..

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